TORIAL BEAUTY
THE SCREEN

ICTOR O. FREEBURG

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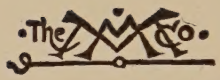
"The public desire for pictorial art in the motion picture—that is, the art of composition of objects and beauty of design—which is the theme of Dr. Freeburg's book, comes contemporaneously with consistent effort on the part of producers of motion pictures to develop and achieve it. There is no doubt that better pictures and higher ideals in their construction are accelerated by attention to this new, inevitable phase of picture making. It is the top step of its ascent to the status of an art. Dr. Freeburg's book deals interestingly with a very important public matter."

PICTORIAL BEAUTY ON THE SCREEN



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From *The Covered Wagon*. The rich variety of light and shadow in this scene, combined with the simple strength of the moving pattern, makes it one of the most charming sections in a remarkable photoplay. See pages 9, 66 and 140.

PICTORIAL BEAUTY ON THE SCREEN

BY

VICTOR OSCAR FREEBURG, PH.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE ART OF PHOTOPLAY MAKING," AND "DISGUISE PLOTS IN ELIZABETHAN DRAMA."

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE
BY REX INGRAM

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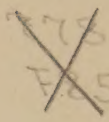

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To

JAMES CRUZE

Because the Various Types of Pictorial Beauty Described in this Book May Be Seen Richly Blended with Epic Narrative and Stirring Drama in "The Covered Wagon," a Cinema Composition That Will Live

PREFATORY NOTE

By Rex Ingram, *Director of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "Scaramouche," etc., etc.*

In this volume Dr. Freeburg contends that in order to be classified among the Arts, the Cinema must become something more than a series of clear photographs of things in motion.

In other words, a motion picture must be composed of scenes that have certain pictorial qualifications, such as form, composition, and a proper distribution of light and shade.

It is chiefly according to the degree in which these qualities are present in a picture, that it can register the full effectiveness of its drama, characterizations and atmosphere.

Dr. Freeburg handles his subject clearly and comprehensively, and I know that the majority who read this book will gain a great deal more enjoyment than previously from productions of the calibre of "Broken Blossoms," "Dr. Caligari," "Blind Husbands," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Nanook of the North," and films more numerous than I can mention by such picture makers as Messrs. Griffith, Seastrom, Tourneur, Von Stroheim and Lubitsch.

Rex Ingram.

August 5th, 1923.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

If I look upon a motion picture as a kind of substitute for some stage play or novel, it seems to me a poor thing, only a substitute for something better; but if I look upon it as something real in itself, a new form of pictorial art in which things have somehow been conjured into significant motion, then I get many a glimpse of touching beauty, and I always see a great range of possibilities for richer beauties in future examples of this new art. Then I see the motion picture as the equal of any of the elder arts.

In other words, I enjoy the movies as pictures, and I do not enjoy them as anything else but pictures. Yet it is on the pictorial side that the movies are now in greatest need of improvement. And this need will probably continue for at least another ten years. I feel that a book such as this may prove to be of considerable help in bringing about that improvement. So far as I know, this is the first book in which a systematic analysis of pictorial composition on the screen has been attempted, although there are certain earlier books in which the pictorial art of the screen has been appraised without analysis, the pioneer work in that class being Vachel Lindsay's "Art of the Moving Picture." The most original things in my present volume are to be found in the chapters on "Pictorial Motions"—or, at least, they ought to be there, else

I am to blame, because that is the phase of cinematic art which has hitherto received the least attention from critics.

"Movie fans" in general are my audience, my hope being that they may find something new in this discussion, something, here and there, which they had not themselves thought of, but which will help them toward a conscious and keen enjoyment of beauty scarcely observed before, and to a more certain discrimination between genuine art on the screen and mere pretentious imitations of art.

In order not to confuse the issue, I have purposely omitted discussions of plot, dramatic situation, characterization, etc., except where these matters are so intimately connected with pictorial form that an omission would be impossible. In short, it is what the picture looks like, rather than what it tells, which here occupies our attention. This study is, therefore, supplementary to my book "The Art of Photoplay Making," which is published by The Macmillan Company.

Mr. James O. Spearing, who was for five years the distinguished motion picture critic on the *New York Times,* and is now on the production staff of the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, has been kind enough to criticize the manuscript of the present work, and I take pride in thanking him publicly for having thus served me with his extensive knowledge and cultivated taste.

V. O. F.

The National Arts Club,
New York City,
August 27th, 1923.

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Pictorial Beauty On the Screen

CHAPTER I

PICTORIAL ART IN THE MOVIES

VAST armies of "movie fans" in massed formation move in and out of the theaters day after day and night after night. They may be trampled on, stumbled over, suffocated; they may have to wait wearily for seats and even for a glimpse of the screen, and yet they come, drawn by a lure which they never dream of denying. Yet the individuals in these crowds are not the helpless victims of mob impulses. Choose the average person among them, and you will find that he is able to criticize what he sees. He has developed no small degree of artistic taste during all the hundreds of nights which he has spent with eyes fixed upon the screen. He can, at least, tell the difference between a dull, common-place plot and one that is original and thrilling. He can distinguish between the reasonable and the ridiculous. He is perfectly aware that much of what he sees is plain "bunk," that it is false, or silly, or of no consequence; and yet, after waiting patiently, he is quick to catch the honest message of significant truth when it comes. He is trained in the appreciation of screen acting, and does not confuse mere showy per-

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formance with sincere, sympathetic interpretation of a dramatic character. And now, at last, the "average movie fan" is beginning to demand that motion pictures have real pictorial beauty, that they be something more than clear photographs of things in motion.

Here we have struck the measure of the motion picture's possibilities as a new art. The masses who pay for tickets have the situation entirely in their hands. Photoplays are improving year by year principally because the public wants better photoplays year by year. When the movies were new, people were satisfied with novelties, mechanical tricks, sensational "stunts," pictures of sensational people, pictures of pretty places, etc., but, although they appreciated what was called good photography, they expressed no craving for genuine pictorial beauty. Later on came the craze for adaptations of popular novels and stage plays to the screen. This was really a great step forward. The motion picture was no longer a mere toy or trick, but was being looked upon as a real art medium. The public had developed a taste for the exciting, clearly told story, and this demand was satisfied by hundreds of excellent photoplays—excellent, at least, according to the standards of the day. Yet the "fans" might have asked for more. They got the story of a famous novel or play, with fairly well acted interpretations by screen folk in proper costumes, and with scenes and settings that usually answered to the descriptions in the literary work adapted; they even got, here and there, a "pretty" view or a chance grouping of striking beauty, but they did not regularly get, or ask for, the kind of beauty which we are accustomed to find in the masterpieces of painting. But taste has been developed by

tasting, and at last the craving for pictorial art has come.

Along with this new public demand for better pictorial qualities in the motion pictures have come higher ideals to those who make and distribute motion pictures. The producers are awakening to their opportunities. They are no longer content with resurrecting defunct stage plays and picturizing them hurriedly, with only enough additions to the bare plot to make the photoplay last five reels. It is not now so much a question of fixing over something old, as of constructing something new. They are beginning to think in terms of pictorial motion. The directors, too—those who have not been forced out of the studios by their lack of ability—have learned their art of pictorial composition in much the same way as the public has developed its taste, that is, by experience. Once they seemed to think that it was enough to tell the heroine when to sob or raise her eyebrows; now they realize that the lines and pattern of the entire figure should be pictorially related to every other line and pattern which is to be recorded by the camera and shown upon the screen. And, finally, along with the director's rise in power and importance is coming the better subordination of the "stars," and yet they shine not the less brightly on the screen.

The early exhibitors were often accused of being "ballyhoo" men, hawking their wares of more or less questionable character. Most of them, indeed, never suspected that motion pictures might contain beauty. Now the worst of them can at least be classed with picture dealers who value their goods because others love them, while the best, including such men as Dr.

Hugo Riesenfeld, have made exhibition itself a new art. They select pictures with conscientious taste, place them in a harmonious program, and show them in a theatrical setting that gives the right mood for æsthetic appreciation on the part of the audience.

Publicity men, too, have felt the temper of the public. Although they still like to exploit sensational features, the language of art is creeping into their "dope." They are beginning to find phrases for the kind of beauty in a film which does not come from a ravishing "star" or the lavish expenditure of money. And the independent reviewers whose criticisms are published in the newspapers and magazines have become professional. There was a time when they contented themselves with listing the cast, revealing the plot in a paragraph, and adding that "the photography is excellent." But now we find thoughtful, discriminating criticisms of photoplays in the film magazines and in the leading daily papers of the country. These critics have learned how to analyze the narrative as a dramatic construction, and how to evaluate the interpretation of character in the acting, but they have also learned something else, and this belongs to the new epoch in the development of the photoplay; they have begun to observe the pictorial art in motion pictures, the endless possibilities of beauty in the pictorial combination of figure, setting, and action; in the arrangement of lines and masses, of lights and shadows, and in the fascinating rhythms of movement on the screen.

This conscious desire for beauty on the screen, which is springing up all along the line, from the producer to the ultimate "fan," has naturally led to public discussion. In school room and church, on "lot" and

"location," in office and studio, in club or casual group, men and women are trying to find words and phrases to express the cinematic beauty which they have sensed. And by that discussion they are sharpening their senses for the discovery of richer beauty in the films that are to come. My contribution to that discussion has taken the form of this book, and my aim has been, first, to collect the topics which are connected with the purely pictorial side of the movies, and, second, to formulate my conception of some of the principles which govern the creation of pictorial beauty on the screen. I have endeavored to see my subject from various angles, assuming at times the position of the sensitive spectator and at times standing, as it were, beside the average director, and presuming to suggest to him what he ought to do to please that spectator.

To begin with, let us take care to avoid some of the common pitfalls of photoplay criticism. It has been a common error to judge a photoplay as though it were a kind of visualized book. Many of us have slipped into the mistake of expecting motion photographs to give us the same kind of pleasure which we get from printed or spoken words. But let us understand from now on that the beauty of a design-and-motion art must of necessity be quite different from the beauty of a word-and-voice art.

This means that we shall have to get out of the habit of using expressions like "He is *writing* a photoplay." A writer might indeed devise a story for a motion picture play, as he might originate and describe an idea for a painting, but it would not in either case be proper to say that he had *written* the picture. This book is not a study of words, phrases, sentences, para-

graphs, etc. It does not deal with literary expression. It deals with fixed and moving designs, the things which the spectator actually sees, the only forms which actually hold and present the contents of a photoplay. At times we shall, of course, be obliged to say something about the familiar "sub-titles," which interrupt the pictorial flow in a film. But word-forms are not characteristic photoplay forms. Fundamentally, a photoplay is a sequence of motion pictures, and a man can no more write those pictures than he can write a row of paintings on a wall. However, it would be unfair to say that a writer could not in some way lend a hand in the making of a motion picture; we merely insist that the finished picture should not be judged as writing.

We must also get rid of the notion that "photoplays are *acted.*" It would hardly be further from the truth to say that paintings are posed. A finished painting may, in fact, contain the image of some person who has posed for the artist; but the painting contains something else far more significant. We cannot thank Raphael's model for the beauty of "The Sistine Madonna," nor can we thank Charles I. of England for the beauty of Van Dyck's portraits of him. Turning to movies, it must be admitted that actors are tremendously important, but it must not be said that they *act* motion pictures. They only act while motion pictures are being made. We cannot thank them for the poignant beauty of glowing lights and falling shadows, of flowing lines, and melting forms, and all that strange evanescence that makes up the lure of cinematic forms.

Also we must reject the theory that the artistic

quality of a photoplay can be guaranteed by engaging so-called art directors who design backgrounds or select natural settings for the action of the film story. The picture which we see on the screen consists not of backgrounds alone; it is rather an ever-varying design of moving figures combined with a fixed or changing background. If an art director limits his work to the preparation of material environment of photoplay action, he is, by definition, responsible only for the place-element in the motion picture. Even if he were to design costumes and general equipment for the players he would still be responsible for only a part of the pictorial elements that appear upon the screen.

Plot, performers, places, equipment—these are only the materials which a picture-maker puts into cinematic forms. The art does not lie in the separate materials; it lies in the organization of those materials, a process which may be called cinema composition.* In a later chapter we shall discuss the proposition that the motion picture director is, or certainly should be, the master cinema composer. Here we simply want to make the point that criticism should concern itself with the finished composition as a whole and not with the parts alone. The critic who is interested only in the plot construction of photoplays may indeed be able to make penetrating comment upon such dramatic qualities as suspense, logic, etc., but he cannot thereby give us any information on those visual aspects which please or displease the eye while the picture is showing. Thus also the critic who looks only

* The terms "cinema composer" and "cinema composition" were devised by the author in 1916, at the time when he and his students founded the Cinema Composers Club at Columbia University.

at the acting in the photoplay is likely to be misled and to mislead us. He may not observe, for example, that a film which has bad joining of scenes, or a bad combination of figure and setting, is a bad cinema composition, however superb the acting may be. And the critic who writes, "The photography is excellent,"—a rubber-stamp criticism—is of no help to art-lovers, because the photography as such may indeed be excellent while the composition of the scenes photographed is atrocious. Cinema criticism, to be of any real value to the "movie fan," must be complete. And that means that he must be enlightened concerning the nature of pictorial design and pictorial progression, as well as concerning the plot, the acting, and the mechanics of photography.

All of us are beginners in this pioneer work of analyzing the motion picture as a design-and-motion art. But the prize is well worth the adventure. Certainly the danger of making mistakes need not alarm us unduly, for even a mistake may be interesting and helpful. At the start we need to sharpen our insight by learning as much about the grammar of pictorial art as we know about the grammar of language, by respecting the logic of line and tone as highly as the logic of fictitious events, by paying tribute to originality in the pattern of pictorial motions no less than to the novelty in fresh dramatic situations. Beyond that the prospect is alluring. Our new understanding will give us greater enjoyment of the pictorial beauty which even now comes to the screen, and the rumor of that enjoyment, sounding through the studios, will assure of us of still greater beauty in the future.

CHAPTER II

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF PICTORIAL COMPOSITION

THE production manager of a large motion picture studio in New York once declared to the author that he was "against artistry in the movies because it usually spoils the picture." "Emotion's what gets 'em, not art," he added. "Besides, a director has to shoot thirty or forty scenes a day, and hasn't got any time to fool away with art notions."

Any one who has seen "The Covered Wagon" (directed by James Cruze for the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation) knows that such talk is nonsense. This remarkable photoplay charms the eye, appeals to the imagination, and stirs the emotions—all in the same "shot." One can never forget the pictorial beauty in those magnificent expanses of barren prairie, traversed by the long train of covered wagons, a white line winding in slow rhythm, while a softly rising cloud of dust blends the tones of the curving canvas tops and of the wind-blown sage brush. Again and again the wagon train becomes a striking pictorial motif, and, whether it is seen creeping across the prairie, following the bank of a river, climbing toward a pass in the mountains, stretching out, a thin black chain of silhouettes on the horizon, curving itself along the palisade-like walls of an arroyo, or halted in snow against a background of Oregon pines, it always adds empha-

sis to the intense drama of the pioneers battling against the hardships of the trail in '48 and '49. Here is entrancing change and flow of pattern, but here is human striving and performance, too; and the emotions of the audience are touched more directly and more deeply because picture and drama have been fused into a single art.

Shortly after "The Covered Wagon" had opened in New York an executive of a certain film company was heard to remark, "Well, no wonder it's a success. It cost $700,000 to make it! Any one could take that much money and make a great picture." I consider that reflection highly unjust and the argument entirely fallacious. Good pictorial composition does not necessarily cost a cent more than bad composition. In fact, it will be shown in the following chapters that a scene of cinematic beauty often costs less than an ordinary arrangement of the same scene.

The pictorial beauty discussed in this book is really a kind of pictorial efficiency, and therefore must have practical, economic value. When a motion picture is well composed it pleases the eye, its meaning is easily understood, and the emotion it contains is quickly and forcefully conveyed. In short, it has the power of art.

Pictorial efficiency cannot be bought. It cannot be guaranteed by the possession of expensive cameras and other mechanical equipment. The camera has no sense, no soul, no capacity for selecting, emphasizing, and interpreting the pictorial subject for the benefit of the spectator. In fact, the camera is positively stupid, because it always shows more than is necessary; it often emphasizes the wrong thing, and it is

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From *The Plough Girl.* The pictorial composition at this moment of the action is bad because the spectator's eye is not led instantly to the book, which is the most important dramatic interest in this scene. See page 11.

notoriously blind to beautiful significance. You who carry kodaks for the purpose of getting souvenirs of your travels have perhaps often been surprised, when the films were developed, to discover some very conspicuous object, ugly and jarring, which you had not noticed at the time when the picture was taken. At that time your mind had forced your eye to ignore all that was not interesting and beautiful, but the camera had made no such choice.

It will not help matters to buy a better lens for your camera and to be more careful of the focus next time. Such things can only make the images more sharp; they cannot alter the emphasis. Unfortunately there are still movie makers, and movie "fans," too, in the world who have the notion that sharpness of photography, or "clearness," as they call it, is a wonderful quality. But such people do not appreciate art; they merely appreciate machinery. To make the separate parts of a picture more distinct does not help us to see the total meaning more clearly. It may, in fact, prevent us from seeing.

Let us look, for example, at the "still" reproduced on the opposite page. The picture is clear enough. We observe that it contains three figures and about a dozen objects. Our attention is caught by a conspicuous lamp, whose light falls upon a suspicious-looking jug, with its stopper not too tightly in. Yet these objects, emphasized as they are, have but slight importance indeed when compared with the book clutched in the man's hand.

This mistake in emphasis is not the fault of the camera; it is the fault of the director, who in the haste, or ignorance, perhaps, of days gone by, com-

posed the picture so badly that the spectators are forced to look first at the wrong things, thus wasting time and energy before they can find the right things. On the screen, to be sure, the book attracts some attention because it is in motion, yet that does not suffice to draw our attention immediately away from the striking objects in the foreground. The primary interests should, of course, have been placed in the strongest light and in the most prominent position.

Guiding the attention of the spectator properly helps him to understand what he is looking at, but it is still more important to help him feel what he is looking at. Movie producers used to have a great deal to say about the need of putting "punch" into a picture, of making it so strong that it would "hit the audience between the eyes." Well, let those hot injunctions still be given. We maintain that good composition will make any motion picture "punch" harder, and that bad composition will weaken the "punch," may, indeed, prevent its being felt at all. But before arguing that proposition, let us philosophize a bit over the manner in which a "punch" operates on our minds.

Anything that impresses the human mind through the eye requires a three-fold expenditure of human energy. There is, first, the physical exertion of *looking,* then the mental exertion of *seeing,* that is, understanding what one looks at, and, finally, the joy of *feeling,* the pouring out of emotional energy. This last is the "punch," the result which every artist aims to produce; but it can only be achieved through the spectator's enjoyment of looking and seeing.

Now, since the total human energy available at any one time for looking, seeing, and feeling is limited, it

is clearly desirable to economize in the efforts of looking and seeing, in order to leave so much the more energy for emotional enjoyment. We shall discuss in the following chapter some of the things which waste our energies during the efforts of looking and seeing. Let us here consider how pictorial composition can control the expenditure of emotional energy, and how it may thus either help or hinder the spectator in his appreciation of beauty on the screen.

Let us imagine an example of a typical "punch" picture and describe it here in words—inadequate though they may be—to illustrate how a bad arrangement of events and scenes may use up the spectator's emotional energy before the story arrives at the event intended to furnish the main thrill. The "punch" in this case is to be the transfer of a man from one airplane to another. But many other things will disturb us on the way, and certain striking scenes will rob the aerial transfer of its intended "punch."

First we see the hero and his pilot just starting their flight in a hydro-airplane, the dark compact machine contrasting strongly with the magnificant spread of white sails of a large sloop yacht—perhaps thus tending to focus our attention on the yacht—which skims along toward the left of our view.

Then, in the next scene, near some country village, evidently miles away from the expanse of water in the first picture, we see a huge Caproni triplane, which must have made a forced landing in the muddy creek of a pasture. A herd of Holstein cows with strange black and white markings, two bare-footed country girls, a shepherd dog, and five helmeted mechanicians, stand helpless, all equally admiring and dumb, while

an alert farmer hitches an amusing span of mules, one black and one gray, to the triplane and drags it out of the mud.

The third scene is strange indeed. It looks at first like a dazzling sea of foam—perhaps the ocean churned to fury by a storm—no, you may not believe it, but it is a sea of clouds. We are in an airplane of our own high in the sky, perhaps miles and miles, or maybe only three-quarters of a mile, above sea level. Just as we become fascinated by the nests of shadows among the cloud billows, a black object swings up from the whiteness, like a dolphin or a submarine from the sea. It is the hydro-airplane with our hero and his pilot; we recognize them because they are now sailing abreast of us only a few yards away. The hero stands up and is about to assume the pose of Washington crossing the Delaware, a difficult thing in such a strong wind when he is suddenly struck from behind by a villain who evidently had concealed himself in the body of the hydro-airplane before the flight was started. The villain is dressed like a soldier and seems to have a knapsack on his back.

Meanwhile, the sea of clouds flows by, dazzling white and without a rift through which one might look to see whether a city, an ocean, a forest, or a cornfield lies below.

Suddenly we look upward and discover the triplane, silhouetted sharply against the sky like the skeleton of some monster. It has five bodies and the five propellors, which three or four minutes ago were paralyzed in the cow pasture, now are revolving so rapidly that we cannot see them. It would be very interesting—but look! the villain and the hero are hav-

ing a little wrestling match on one of the wings of their plane. Let us hope the hero throws the villain into the clouds! He does, too! But villains are deucedly clever. The knapsack turns into a parachute, which spreads out into a white circular form, more circular than any of the clouds. We wonder if there will be any one to meet him when he lands—but, don't miss it! This is the "punch"! The triplane is flying just above the hydro-airplane. Somebody lets down a rope ladder, which bends back like the tail of a kite. The hero grabs it, grins at the camera, climbs up, and with perfect calmness asks for a cigarette, though he doesn't light it, because that would be against the pilot's rules.

Well, the transfer from one airplane to another wasn't so much of a "punch," after all.

Now let us count the thrills of such a picture as they might come to us from the screen. First, in order of time, would be our delight at the stately curves of the gleaming sails of the yacht, but this delight would be dulled somewhat by the physical difficulty experienced by the eyes in following the swaying, thrusting movement of the yacht as it heels from the breeze, and at the same time following the rising shape of the hydro-airplane; and it would be further dulled by the mental effort of trying to see the dramatic relation between yacht and plane. But, whether dulled or not, this thrill would be all in vain, for it surely does not put more force into the "punch" which we set out to produce, namely, the transfer of a man from one airplane to another.

The yacht, therefore, being unnecessary to our story, violates the principle of unity; it violates the

principles of emphasis and balance, because it distracts our attention from the main interest; and it violates the principle of rhythm, because it does not take a part in the upward-curving succession of interests that should culminate with the main "punch."

If the plane of our hero must rise from the water, and if there is to be a secondary interest in the picture, let it be something which, though really subordinate, can intensify our interest in the plane. Perhaps a clumsy old tug would serve the purpose, its smoke tracing a barrier, above which the plane soars as easily as a bird. Or perhaps a rowboat would be just as well, with a fisherman gazing spellbound at the machine that rises into the air. Either of these elements would emphasize the idea of height and danger.

The scene of the triplane in the pasture with the cows, mules, etc., might be mildly amusing. But our eyes would be taxed by its moving spots, and, since its tones would be dark or dark gray, the pupils of our eyes would become dilated, and would therefore be totally unprepared for the flash of white which follows in the next scene.

The white expanse of fleecy clouds would shock the eyes at first sight, since the approach to the subject had not been properly made; but in a moment we would be stirred by the feeling that we were really above the clouds. We would seem to have passed into a new world with floods of mist. The long stretches of white are soft as eiderdown, yet, because of our own motion, they seem like the currents of a broad river, and one can almost imagine that it were possible to steer a canoe over those rapids. All this

would be the second thrill, beautiful in itself but not actually tending to emphasize the "punch" of a man transferring from one airplane to another.

The third thrill would surely come when the hydro-airplane swings up through these clouds, like a dolphin from the sea, and yet not like a dolphin, because it rises more slowly and in a few moments soars freely into the air, a marvellous happening which no words can describe. Yet this thrill, like the others, would exhaust our emotions rather than leave them fresh for the "punch" we started out to produce, the transfer of a man from one airplane to another.

Most thrilling of all would be the moments between the instant when the villain is pushed off the wing of the plane and the instant when his parachute snaps open. The white mass of the parachute, almost like a tiny cloud, spreads out at the instant when it reaches the layer of clouds, as if they pushed it open; then the parachute sinks into the clouds and dies out like a wave of the sea.

After all these thrills, the intended "punch" would come like a slap on the wrist. A man might now leap back and forth from one airplane to another until it was time to go home for supper, and we would only yawn at his exploits.

Now one of the morals of this story is that we did get a "punch," even though it was not the one originally intended by our imagined producer. Treasures often lie in unsuspected places. Nearly every common-place film on the screen contains some beauty by accident, some unexpected charm, some unforseen "punch," something the director never dreamed of, which outshines the very beauty which he aimed to

produce. And whenever a thoughtful person is stirred by such accidental beauty he is delighted to think that such a thing is possible. In the exceptional films, he knows, such effects are produced by design instead of by chance. It is better business, and it is better art.

We said at the beginning of this chapter that it was clearly desirable to economize the spectator's efforts of looking and seeing, in order that he may have the greatest possible amount of energy left for the experience of emotion. This is desirable even from a business man's point of view. We shall now try to show that emotional thrills can actually be controlled by design, by what we shall call pictorial composition.

But how is pictorial composition controlled, and who controls it? How far is the scenario writer responsible for pictorial value? How much of the pictorial composition shall the director direct, and how much of it may safely be left to other hands? And, if a picture is well composed, does that guarantee beauty? The answers to these questions depend upon our definition of terms.

Composition in general means, of course, simply bringing things together into a mutual relation. A particular combination of parts in a picture may help the spectator, or may hinder him more than some other possible combination of the same parts. Composition is form, and as such should be revealing and expressive at the same time that it is appealing in itself. Good composition cannot easily be defined in a single sentence, but, for the sake of order in our discussion, I wish to offer the following as my working

definition. The best cinema composition is that arrangement of elements in a scene or succession of scenes which enables us to see the most with the least difficulty and the deepest feeling.

A remarkable thing about composition is that it cannot be avoided. Every picture must have some kind of arrangement, whether that arrangement be good, bad, or indifferent. As soon as an actor enters a room he makes a composition, because every gesture, every movement, every line of his body bears some pictorial relation to everything else within range of our vision. Even to draw a single line or to prick a single point upon a sheet of paper is to start a composition, because such a mark must bear some relation to the four unavoidable lines which are described by the edges of the paper.

To place a flower in a vase is to make a composition. If the arrangement contains more meaning, more significance than the exhibition of the flower and the vase separately, and if this meaning can easily be perceived, the composition is good. A bad composition would doubtless result if we placed the flower and vase together in front of a framed photograph, because the three things would not fuse together into a unity which contained more meaning than the things had separately. In fact, even the separate values would be lost, because the vase would obscure the photograph, which in turn would distract our attention from the vase. In other words, the arrangement would not help us to see much with ease.

On the other hand, to place the flower and vase against some hanging or panel which harmonizes with them in color and emphasizes the beauty of the flower,

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is good composition, providing the rest of the environment is in harmony. The vase must, of course, stand on something, perhaps a table or a mantel-piece. This support must have shape, lines, color and texture, all visual elements which must be skillfully wrought into our design if the composition is to be successful. We see, therefore, that the artistic arrangement of simple things which do not move, which stay where you put them, is by no means a simple matter.

What we have just described may be called composition in a general sense, but it represents only the initial process in pictorial composition. The picture maker's work only begins with the arranging of the subject. It does not end until he has recorded that subject in some permanent form, such as a painting, a drawing, or a celluloid negative. In the recording, or treatment, the painter tries to improve the composition of his subject. He changes the curves of the vase and the flower somewhat in order to obtain a more definite unity. He softens the emphasis in one place and heightens it in another. He balances shape against shape. He swings into the picture a rhythm of line and tone which he hopes may express to some beholder the harmony which he, the artist, feels. In other words, the painter begins by arranging things, he continues by altering the aspects of those things until they fit his conception of the perfect picture of the subject before him, and he finishes the composition only when he leaves a permanent record of what he has seen and felt.

Now it is evident that the painter might begin, without an actual flower or vase or panel or table, by merely arranging his mental images of those things.

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The Shepherdess, a painting by LeRolle, illustrating several principles of design which can be effectively used in photoplays. See page 55.

But the process would, of course, still be composition. If, for example, he were to say to himself "Tomorrow I shall paint a picture of a rose in a slate-blue vase standing on an antique oak table backed by a gray panel," that very arrangement of images in his mind would be the first phase of his composition. Or if a customer were to come to him and say "Tomorrow I want you to paint for me a picture of a rose," etc., the process of bringing things together would still be composition; only in that case it begins with the customer and is completed by the painter.

If we apply this reasoning to the movies it is clear that as soon as a scenario writer writes a single line saying that a hydro-airplane takes off from the sea, he has already started a pictorial composition. Although he may not realize it, he has already brought together the long straight line of the horizon, the short curving lines of the waves, and the short straight and oblique lines of the plane. He has already made it necessary to combine certain tonal values of airplane and sky and sea, though he may not have stopped to consider what those tonal values might be.

But the writer does other things of greater consequence than the combining of shapes and tonal values. He prescribes motions and locomotions of things, and he orders the succession of scenes. Even if he writes only that "a plane rises from the sea," he makes necessary the combination of a great number of movements. On the screen that plane will have at least four movements, namely, rising, tilting, going toward the right or the left, and the movement of diminishing size. And the sea will have at least three movements, namely, undulation, flowing, and the movement of the

wake. Now if the scenario writer adds something else to the same scene, or prescribes the mutual relation of things and movements which are to appear in the next scene, he is, of course, merely continuing the process of cinema composition.

Insofar as the writer makes the combination of these things essential to the story he circumscribes the power, he may even tie the hands, of the director. For the latter, unless he ignores the composition thus begun, can do only one thing with it; he can only carry it on.

Now it is a sad thing to relate that many scenario writers do not suspect the truth of what we have just said. Some of them are evidently unaware of the significant fact that their description is really a prescription, that even by their written words they are really drawing the first lines of hundreds of pictures, that they are actually engaged in pictorial composition. They may be without knowledge of graphic art and without skill. They may not be able to take a pencil or a piece of charcoal and sketch out a horse or a hut or the general aspect of a single pictorial moment as it would appear on the screen. They may never have given any thought to the question of how best to arrange simultaneous or successive movements in order to give the strongest emotional appeal to the spectator. Yet they are drawing screen pictures, and drawing them on the typewriter!

Of course, even the most intelligent scenario writers, even those who have the most accurate knowledge of pictorial values on the screen and the keenest power of visualizing their story as it will appear after it has been screened, are always handicapped by work-

ing in the medium of language. Words are not motion-photographs, any more than they are paint or marble. This is the scenario writer's handicap. But, though we may sympathize with him because of the handicap, we cannot relieve him of responsibility as the designer of beginnings in the cinema composition.

The director has a handicap, too. He also does not work in the medium of motion photographs. He cannot do so. Even if he were to look through the viewfinder of the motion picture camera during the entire taking of every scene, he would not see exactly what we are destined to see in the theater. He would see things only in miniature, in a glass some two inches square, instead of larger than life. He would see things, not in black and white, but in their true colors. And he can never, under any circumstance, behold two or more scenes directly connected, with no more than the wink of an eye between them, until after the negatives have been developed, positives printed, and the strips spliced together in the cutting and joining room.

In other words, neither the scenario writer nor the motion picture director can ever know definitely in advance just what the finished work will look like to us in the theater. If we are aware of these handicaps, it may help us to understand why ugliness so often slips through to the screen, but it will not permit us to tolerate that ugliness. We, as spectators and critics, must forever insist that the photoplay makers master their art, no matter how difficult the mastery may be.

It was held some years ago that the only thing the matter with the movies was that the stories were badly composed and of little originality. Hence, a number of prominent novelists and playwrights were hired to

adapt their own literary work or prepare new stories for the screen. But these literary men were among the first to discover that better *writing* does not in itself guarantee better *pictures*. It is the director who is more truly the picture maker than any one of his collaborators in the work. Ideally, he should prepare his own scenario, just as the painter makes his own preliminary sketches, and the fiction writer makes his own first draught of a story. Ideally, too, the plot should be devised by the director (who might then truly be called a cinema composer), devised especially for motion pictures, and with peculiar qualities and appeals that could never so well be expressed in other mediums.

But that is an ideal to be dreamed of. And, meanwhile, we "movie fans" can enjoy the best that is being produced by collaborative methods, and we can help toward the achievement of still better things by developing a thorough appreciation of what is pictorially pleasing, at the same time that we train ourselves to detect and talk out of existence the common faults of the movies.

CHAPTER III

EYE TESTS FOR BEAUTY

Do THE movies hurt your eyes? Some say "yes" and some say "no." Why is it that photoplay scenes sometimes flash and dazzle, but have neither radiance nor sparkle? Why is it that the motions sometimes shown on the screen get "on your nerves"? Why is it that you look at so much on the screen and remember so little? These questions can be answered by making certain eye tests for beauty, and, having answered them, we may proceed to a detailed discussion of pictorial composition in a great variety of cases.

In order to understand how the pleasure of pictorial beauty comes to a spectator, we must analyze the processes of looking and seeing. These processes consist partly of eye-work and partly of brain-work. That is, the physical eye must do certain work before the brain gets the visual image. Now if the physical eye has to work too hard, or bear a sudden strain, or undergo excessive wear, it will not function well; and, consequently, the brain will have to work harder in order to grasp the picture. All this causes displeasure, and displeasure is in conflict with beauty.

Let us state, once for all, that motion pictures need never hurt the eyes—quite the contrary. Yet we have

often seen photoplays that did hurt the eyes. Some of the reasons for this will be given in the following paragraphs.

A familiar operation of the physical eye is the contraction and dilation of the pupil. We know from childhood that the pupil grows large when the light is weak, and small when the light is strong. We also know that the eye cannot make this adjustment instantly. If a strong light is suddenly flashed on us, for example, when we lie awake in a dark room it dazzles us, because our pupils are adjusted for darkness; it even hurts so much that we defend ourselves by closing the eyelids.

In exactly the same way our eyes are shocked by the movies when a dazzling white light is flashed on the screen where a somewhat darkened scene has just vanished. The pupil is caught unawares, is not instantly able to protect the eye, and, besides, must use up a certain amount of energy in adapting itself to the new condition. Such a shock once or twice during the evening might easily be forgiven and forgotten, might, in fact, be hardly felt at the time; but fifty such shocks in a five-reel photoplay would certainly weary the eye, and a play of that sort could hardly be called beautiful.

The fault which we have just named lies in the joining of scenes. But it is not, as a rule, necessary to connect scenes or sections of a film so that there is a jump from the darkest dark to the whitest white, or vice versa. This can be avoided, of course, by the device of "fading out" one scene and "fading in" the next, which gives the eye time to adapt itself, or by "fading down" or "up" just far enough to match the

exact tone of the next picture. The shock can also be avoided by joining various sections of the film in a series of steps of increasing brightness or darkness.

The eye is hurt, we have said, by a sharp succession of black and white. It is also hurt by a sharp contrast of whites and blacks lying side by side on the screen. Such extremes are avoided in paintings. The next time you are in an art museum please compare the brightest white in any portrait with the white of your cuff, or your handkerchief, or a piece of paper. You may be surprised to discover that the high light in that painting is not severely white. It is rather grayish or yellowish, soft and easy to the eye. Observe also that the darkest hue in that painting is far from the deepest possible black. The extremes of tone are, in fact, never very far apart, and are therefore easily grasped by the eye without undue strain.

And while you are thinking of this practice of painters, you might compare it with the similar practice of composers of music. Your piano has many keys, the highest one in the treble being extremely far from the lowest one in the bass. Yet if you examine the score of any single piece of music you will discover that the highest note in that piece is not so very far from the lowest note in the same piece. It might have been possible to use the entire keyboard, but the composer has been wise enough not to try it. His extreme notes are so near together that the ear is able to catch them and all the subtle values of the music in between, without being strained by the effort.

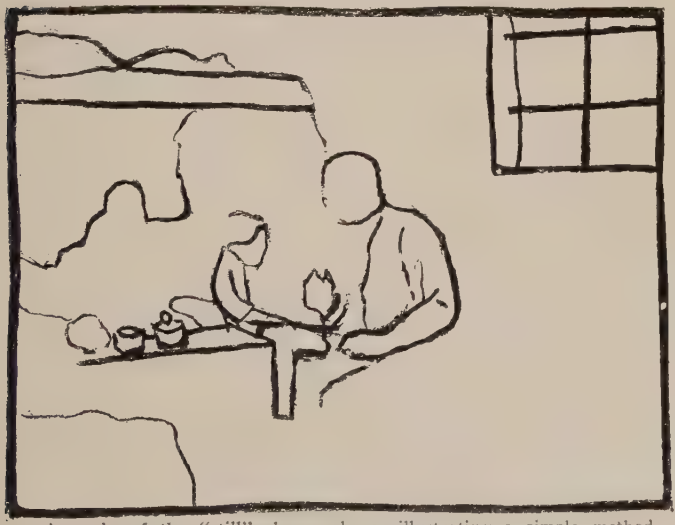
It seems, therefore, that in artistic matters moderation is a good thing, is, in fact, necessary to produce real beauty. But moderation in the movies is not yet

a widely accepted gospel. Too often we find that the dazzling flood of rays from a strong searchlight blazes over several square yards of the silver screen, while at the same moment, on adjoining parts of the same screen hang the deep shades of night. The contrasts are sharp as lightning, not only in the scenes, but also in the sub-titles which are cut in between. Our eyes gaze and twitch and hurt, until it is a real relief to step out and rest them upon something comparatively moderate, like the electric signs on Broadway.

If there were some mechanical difficulty which made this clashing effect of the motion pictures necessary, we could never hope for beauty on the screen; for no art can achieve beauty by producing pain. But we know from the work of such directors as James Cruze, D. W. Griffith, Allan Dwan, Rex Ingram, and John Robertson, that the moving picture camera is capable of recording light gray and dark gray, as well as steel white and ebony. They have shown us that it is possible to produce sub-titles with light gray lettering against a dark gray ground, and that such a combination of tones is pleasing to the eye. They have shown us that it is possible to screen a lady of the fairest face and dressed in the snowiest gown so as to bring out the softest tones of light and shade, yet show nothing as dazzling as snow and nothing as black as ebony.

Some of the "stills" in this book give a hint of the sharp contrasts in the inferior films, but it is only a hint, because the white portions in those illustrations can be no whiter than the paper of the page, which is dull in comparison with the blaze on the screen. The

From *The Spell of the Yukon.* An interesting example of *chiaroscuro* and the harmonizing of dramatic pantomime with pictorial pattern. The composition, however, is slightly marred by over-emphasis on the window. See pages 55 and 63.



A study of the "still" shown above, illustrating a simple method of analyzing pictorial composition. See page 63.

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movie theater is the best place to verify the theories which we are here trying to explain in words. Go to the movies. Whenever you find that you enjoy the films thoroughly, then by all means do not stop to analyze or criticise. If you enjoy any particular film so much that you are sure you would like to see it two or three times every year for the rest of your life, you may be happy, for you have discovered one of the classics of the screen. Do not analyze that film either, unless you are in the business of making pictures. But if a film makes you uncomfortable, or if it is so bad that you are quite disgusted with it, then, though you must become a martyr to do it, please stay and see it again. Compare the good parts of the film, if there are any, with the bad parts; study it in detail until you see where the trouble lies. And when you have discovered the real causes of ugliness in that film, wouldn't it be a public service to express your opinion in such a way that the manager of your theater might hear it?

Thus far in this chapter we have discussed only a single operation of the eye, namely, the expanding and contracting of the pupils under the effect of darkness and brightness, but it is easy to understand now how such an apparently slight thing may seriously affect our enjoyment of the movies. Let the reader, when he is next displeased by a picture, test it for sharpness of contrast between white and black. He will probably not have to seek further for explanation of its ugliness.

Another operation which the eye-machine performs is the accommodation to color. It is somewhat similar to the accommodation to distance, which we shall de-

scribe, if the reader will help us by making an experiment. Close one eye and look steadily with the other at an object across the room. Now, without changing your gaze, hold up your finger in line with this object and about a foot away from your eye. The outline of the finger will be indistinct as long as you keep the eye focused on the remote object. Now, still keeping one eye shut, look at your finger until you can see the little ridges on it. The eye has changed its focus, and the remote object is now indistinct. What happens is that the lens within the eye changes its shape, bulging more for near objects and flattening again for distant objects. This work of the eye, called accommodation, is done by certain delicate muscles. A little of it may be stimulating, but too much will make the eyes tired.

Now it is a strange thing that certain colors affect the eyes in the same way as distances. Painters knew this fact for hundreds of years before the scientists were able to explain the reason. They knew that blue seemed farther away than red, and arranged the colors in their paintings accordingly. All artists have learned the trick, even some of our commercial artists, who make advertising posters for street cars. Blue makes the background fall back; red makes a figure stand forward. The reason for this illusion is that when the eye looks at red it adjusts itself exactly as if it were looking at a near object, and thus deceives the brain, so to speak; and when it looks at blue it adjusts itself as if it were looking at a distant object and again deceives the brain. Or, to state the fact more completely, a color from the red end of the color scale (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) seems

nearer to the eye than one from the violet end, even though the colors are all placed equally distant from the eye.

Now we shall see that, although these effects of color are useful in a painting, they may be harmful in a motion picture. When we behold a painting in which colors ranging from red to yellow are contrasted with colors ranging from violet to blue, we may, indeed, get a pleasant sensation of the eye because of the stimulating activity in the work of accommodation. There is to most people a distinct pleasure, for example, in shifting the gaze from orange-yellow to blue, because those colors are felt to be "complementary." But it must be remembered that the circumstances of looking at a painting are entirely different from those of looking at a motion picture.

Two differences are especially notable. The first difference is that when we look at a painting we ourselves are practically the choosers of when and how long to look at any spot, line, shape, or color. In other words, we ourselves practically decide on how much and what kind of work our eyes shall do; but when we look at a motion picture we never know at any instant what we may be called upon to do the next instant. That makes us nervous. We need to be constantly braced for the shock and, if we are not so braced, we must suffer when the shock comes.

The second difference is that everything in a painting is always actually at rest, while nearly everything in a motion picture is always in motion. If a painting, which does not move in any of its parts, can suggest movement to our imagination, or can make our eyes perform actual movements of vision, such move-

ments, actual and imaginary, are pleasantly stimulating. The eyes enjoy the natural activity of their work, and we feel that there is life in the painting. But the motion picture, by its very nature, has as much life as it needs. It naturally gives the eyes all the work they can stand. Hence, if they need any stimulating change at all, it is rather the change from movement to repose.

Now let us go to the movie theater. Very likely before the show is over we shall be treated to a rapid shifting from the blue of some exterior scene in the moonlight to the orange-yellowish glow of some interior scene in lamplight. Our eyes, therefore, must accommodate their lenses to one of these colors again and again, only to receive a sudden demand for accommodation to the other color. We have no choice in the matter except to get up and go out. Our eyes, already busy enough, do not need the stimulation of any more activity, and our minds, already active enough, would prefer the relief of something more reposeful.

If the director must have this shifting from blue to orange to blue, etc., he might, at least, give us some warning, some softening of the shock, so to speak. For example, if there is to be a sudden shift from a yellowish lamp-light scene to a bluish night scene, a hint might be given by attracting our attention to a window, through which the blue of night is shown. And similarly in a bluish night scene our attention might be attracted toward the warm glow from a door or window as a warning that the next scene is to be flooded with that color. Thus in either case we would have a chance to prepare our eyes for the shift,

and we would sense a better continuity of movement.

The subject of color in the movies will be discussed again in following chapters. It may be remarked in passing that, since color movies are still highly experimental, it is only to be expected that mistakes of many kinds will be made. Doubtless the leading directors can be trusted to learn from experience. Yet it behooves us who sit in the theaters to be as disapproving of new faults as we are exultant over new beauties.

It is not discouraging to discover a fault, so long as we see that it is one which might have been avoided. We want to make it plain in this chapter that, although the movies sometimes hurt the eyes, it is never due to any necessity. It is a fact that pictures on the screen, when properly made, are always pleasing to the spectators' eyes. And he who does not accept this as a fundamental proposition can hardly come by any large faith in the future of the photoplay as art.

But we must make a few more eye tests for beauty. If you face a wall about twenty feet away, you can, without changing the position of your head, look at the left side or the right, at the top or bottom, or you can look at the four corners of the wall in succession. These three different kinds of movements, vertical, horizontal, circular, are controlled by as many different sets of muscles.

When we look at pictures, especially large pictures, these muscles are constantly busy directing our line of regard from one point of interest to another; and, whether there are definite points of interest or not, our eyes will range over the lines and shapes as we try to discover what they are meant to represent.

Now a certain amount of eye-movement does not hurt the muscles; it is, on the contrary, rather pleasant, because their business is to attend to those maters. But the eye will become fatigued by a great amount of movement, especially when it is forced upon us at unexpected moments, just as any other part of the body will become fatigued when it is forced to perform a great number of sudden, unexpected tasks.

A simple experiment will illustrate this further. Suppose that we are sitting in our door-yard, gazing across a valley at a group of trees a mile or so away. It is more restful to look at those distant trees than at a single tree only fifty feet away; and the reason is simple. When we look at any object our eyes have a tendency to follow its outline. Now, of course, it requires more rolling of the eyes to follow the outline of a tree near by than one in the distance. This rolling movement involves muscular work. And, if we look first at the near, large object and then shift to the distant, small ones, we immediately experience the restfulness of reduced work. There are other reasons why distant objects are restful to the eyes, but they do not concern us here.

Have you ever noticed the pleasing effect in the motion pictures when the thing of interest, say, a train or a band of horsemen disappearing in the distance, narrows itself down to a small space? All images on the screen are, of course, equally distant from the spectator; yet there is a sense of restfulness, as we have just explained, because the rolling of the eyes decreases with the diminishing of the image and its area of movement on the screen.

But suddenly there comes a close-up of a face

twenty feet in diameter, and our eyes have to get busy in the effort to cover the whole field at once. They rove quickly over several square yards of screen until that face is completely surveyed and every detail noted. Lots of looking! Yes, but that "star" gets fifty thousand dollars a month! Can't fool the camera though—crow's-feet on both sides—fourteen diamonds in the left ear-drop and——

Flash to a broad, quiet, soft gray landscape, with a lone rider on the horizon—oh, pshaw!—diamonds must 'a' been glass though—anyway, this picture's good for sore eyes—kind o' easy feelin'—Indian scout maybe—or a——

Flash to a close-up of a Mexican bandit, etc., etc. And our eyes get busy again mapping out the whole subject from hat to hoof, from bridle to tail. Exciting! Oh, yes, indeed, and interesting too, but not as art; for those little muscles up there are jerked around too much, they are working overtime, and soon get weary.

"Oh, well, I reckon I can stand the strain," says some heckler, who "don't quite, you know, get this high-brow stuff." Of course, he can stand it. We have stood the mad orchestra of the elevated trains, and the riveters, and the neighbor's parrot for years, but we do not call it music.

The difference between noise and harmony is a physical difference. If this were not true, no one could ever tune your piano. Jarring, clashing, discordant sounds displease the ear. Just why noise displeases is not for us to say. But we have already explained three reasons why bad motion pictures hurt the eyes. Let us remember them. First, sudden shifts from

dark to bright pictures shock the eye. Second, sudden shifts from a picture in a "cool" tint to another in a "warm" tint, and vice versa, over-work the eye. Third, a series of quick close-ups or other pictures in which the frame is filled with the subject demands too much eye-movement.

In the case of the close-up, or any large picture where the points of interest are scattered all over the field of vision, the eyes, as we have said, become strained by too much rolling, a muscular effort which is necessary even though the separate points of interest may themselves be fixed, as fixed as the four corners of the screen itself.

But when the points of interest are moving things, as they generally are in the movies, new causes of strain often arise. Sometimes the object we are trying to look at moves so fast that we can hardly follow it. Quick movement is generally desired by the directors because they think that briskness, or "pep," makes the dramatic action more intense. Consequently people in the movies walk, march, dance, fight, and carry on with terrific speed until our eyes become tired in the attempt to observe all that is happening. The cure for such pictorial hysterics is simple moderation, the elimination of jerky movements wherever possible, and the choice of movements so easy to follow that the eye may perceive them with the least muscular effort.

We do not say that you who worship speed shall not have your express trains, your racing cars, your airplanes, your cow-ponies, and your Arabian steeds. You may have them all, because they can be so photographed that an actual run of two or three miles may

be presented on the screen as a movement of only two or three feet.

We find, too, that there is something pleasing about the apparent slowness of actions that are moderated by distance. On the far horizon, therefore, the fleetest things seem retarded to a stately pace that claims our restful gaze. But when a quick movement takes place in the foreground of the picture, too near the camera, ugliness results, because the demands on the eye-muscles are too severe and unexpected. Thus a sudden gesture, or the waving branches of trees or bushes, or a motor car driving up in front of a house, or even such intended grace as the movement in dancing, may spoil a picture by being too near the camera.

Another thing which makes close-up movements ugly is the flicker, which cannot be entirely eliminated. Our readers are doubtless generally aware that what we see on the screen is simply the blending of a rapid succession of still pictures falling on different spots in an order and a direction which gives the appearance of motion. If you examine a film you will find that there are in fact sixteen little photographs, or "frames" to every foot of ribbon. The negative runs through the camera, and the positive film through the projecting machine, at a rate of about a foot per second. Now let us suppose that we have a screen sixteen feet long and that we throw upon it a picture of a car running at the rate of ten or eleven miles per hour. If the picture is a close view the image will move across our screen in just one second of time, for the speed we have assumed is at the rate of sixteen feet per second. But, since there are only sixteen frames in that foot, or second, of film, we know

that only sixteen flashes of the car have been thrown on the screen during that second. Therefore, whatever particular part of the car we are looking at has fallen on sixteen different spots of the screen, and each spot is just one foot to the side of the previous one, because the screen is by assumption just sixteen feet wide. Now these separations are so wide that the eye cannot help noticing them even in the fraction of a second; there is not sufficient blending of images to form smooth motion; and the so-called flicker results.

However, if the car is photographed going obliquely away from us, the entire motion may occupy only a small area of the screen, no matter how far or fast the car goes; consequently the images fall much closer together and the flicker becomes so slight that we scarcely notice it. Also, since the field of movement is smaller in extent, the rolling of our eyes in ranging over the subject is less, and the fatigue of the muscles is so slight that we scarcely notice that either.

We have been arguing that large violent movements on the screen hurt the eyes, and we hope that our readers agree with us. But if any one is doubtful we invite him to make the following test. Go to any movie theater and sit down in the seventh or eighth row. Then after having seen about half of the picture, move back to the last row, or stand behind the last row. The picture will immediately seem more restful to the eyes, because the distance has made the screen seem smaller and the motions slower, two changes which, of course, make less work for the eyes. Now stay in the new position until the program is finished, and then see that part of the picture which

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Daylight and Lamplight, a painting by William McGregor. The design illustrates artistic balance and rhythm. See pages 41 and 77.

A study of lines to illustrate the value of repetition within a pattern. See page 40.

was at first seen from the front seat. It will appear much more pleasing to the eye than it did the first time.

But we cannot all sit in the back row of a theater, and besides, even when screen motions are reasonably slow and limited, they may still fail to produce the effect of beauty.

Now, before we go further into this discussion of beauty on the screen, let us recall, that, as we have already said, the process of vision is partly eye-work and partly brain-work. These two factors are so closely connected in fact, that scientists cannot definitely separate them.*

From the results published in scientific periodicals it may be learned that visible ugliness does not always make the physical work of the eye more difficult. This is not to contradict what we have already said in this chapter, but merely to state that there may be certain kinds of ugliness on the screen which apparently do not hurt the eye at all. And yet ugliness does affect the mental phase of vision. It will be worth while giving a page or more to the testing of this statement; and the discussion may lead to a useful definition to keep in mind when criticizing the movies.

Curiously enough, the muscular movement of the eye when ranging over a single jagged, irregular line is practically the same as when ranging over a graceful

* If any of our readers are especially interested in the details of physiological and psychological experiments in vision which are made by experts, they should read Chapter III in Hugo Muensterberg's "The Photoplay," and should consult the current numbers and the volumes for the last five or six years of the "Psychological Review," the "American Journal of Psychology," the "Journal of Experimental Psychology," and other similar periodicals, which are available in any large library.

line of similar length and direction. Scientific experiment shows that we move our eye-balls in a jerky, irregular manner, even when we view the most graceful line that can be drawn. Yet it is commonly said by all of us that one line delights the eye and the other does not. Evidently, therefore, the difference must lie in that function of seeing which the brain performs. But the brain, too, is a physical organ. It, too, can become fatigued, and it finds certain kinds of work less fatiguing than others.

Psychologists have suggested that a graceful line is pleasant to look at because the regularity and smoothness of its changes in direction make it easily perceived as a complete unity. Thus in the diagram facing page 39, lines A and B are pleasanter to look at than lines C and D, because their character as lines can be grasped by the mind more quickly and more easily than the character of C or D. And, for the same reason, lines A and B taken together make a more pleasing combination than lines B and C or lines C and D.

Now, if you will shut the book and try to draw any one of these four lines, even in your imagination, you will discover that you remember A and B almost perfectly, while you can hardly remember a single part of either C or D. This proves that in your own case the business of seeing has been more successful with graceful lines than with ugly ones. And, of course, successful effort is always more pleasing than failure.

Our working definition of good pictorial composition, offered in the preceding chapter, may be adapted here. Let us put it this way: A beautiful line or combination of lines is one in which we can see and

feel much with ease, while an ugly line or combination is one in which we cannot see or feel much except with great difficulty. The terms "ease" and "difficulty" apply both to eye-work and brain-work.

One reason why we see *much with ease* in a beautiful line is evidently that any one part of the whole is a kind of key to some adjoining or corresponding part. Thus in line A the lower curve is very similar to the upper curve and leads into it with the smoothest continuity. And this same lower curve of A is so similar to the lower curve of B that we can see instantly the balanced relation between them. In ugly lines, on the other hand, there are no such visual helps. Yet, if some kind of balance or repetition is adopted, it may be that lines which are ugly when considered singly take on a kind of beauty or interestingness when considered as a group. Thus lines E, F, and G, are not as pleasing when standing alone as they become when considered in relation to a similar line symmetrically placed. Therefore, the combinations EF or FG, or even EFG are more pleasing than any one of their parts.

Now let us apply these principles of continuity and repetition to the lines in a picture. If you turn to Paxton's "Daylight and Lamplight," facing page 39, you will observe instantly the beautifully curving line of the woman's back and also a balancing line down the side of the urn. That sweep of line gives at once the key to the arrangement of the picture.* In other words, you can see much of that picture with ease,

* Out of fairness to the painter it must be added that this canvas, as the title indicates, is also a study in the balancing of cool and warm colors.

even in a glance. Now if you examine this picture more in detail you will find much continuity of line and many parallelisms of line and shape, all of which tend to make the arrangement simple, without reducing any of the actual contents of the picture.

The "much" which we can see in a beautiful line includes such things as its meaning or use in the picture, its fitness for that use, its power to suggest associations, its interestingness, etc. But we shall not take up those phases of beauty in this chapter; we are now merely arguing that pictorial beauty economizes the work of the eye and brain, while visible ugliness does not.

What we said, a moment ago, regarding the value of continuity and repetition in fixed lines may also be applied to moving lines and objects. The great appeal of the screen lies in the showing of vivid movement, the flow of forms, the subtle weaving, through soft play of light and shadow, of fanciful figures that melt like music while we gaze, and yet remain in our minds like curves of a strange melody. When such glimpses of beauty come, our eyes and brains surely do not feel any friction or strain in the process of looking. But when ugly motions are presented the eye must perform excessive movement, and the brain must exert excessive effort.

What is an ugly motion? To answer this we must observe one or two facts concerning the visual process of seeing motions. We must admit the fact that one can perceive the motion of an object without following it with the eyes. Any one can test this for himself by fixing his eyes steadily on some spot on the wall. Without shifting his glance he may have knowledge

of motions going on at other places many feet away from that spot. But it is also a fact that he will immediately feel an inclination to shift his eyes in order to see any one of these motions more clearly. In making that shift he will, of course, have to move his eyeballs. Now, if that moving object changes its place, his eyeballs will continue to make the movements necessary to follow it. And, if the attention continues directed toward that object, his eyes will have to make great or small movements, according as the object makes a great or small change of place.

An interesting theory, which scientific tests support, is that, although the eye has to make a series of irregular, jerky movements when following any moving object, these movements become fewer and smaller as the smoothness and regularity of the observed motion increases.

What we have just said about eye movement explains, at least partly, why the aimless crawling of a house fly over a window pane is ugly, while the graceful flying of a sea gull is beautiful; why the clambering of a monkey is ugly, while the swimming of a fish is graceful, and why the zigzag falling of a sheet of paper thrown from a window is displeasing, while the smooth spiralling of an airplane is pleasing.

In some of the movements which we classify as beautiful, it is clear that the principle of repetition is at work, which, as we have said, makes seeing easy. Any task accomplished once and undertaken again becomes easier and easier with repetition. We have already shown how this makes the perception of rhythmical fixed lines or balanced composition of fixed lines easier for the mind, if not for the eye itself.

A similar experience of ease comes from viewing rhythmical or balanced motions.

You would not enjoy watching a dancer whose every movement was entirely unlike every previous movement. The effect would be utter confusion. You could not grasp, could not remember, what you saw. And you would probably say that it was not dancing at all. On the contrary, the beauty of a dance is largely due to the frequent repetitions or similarities of movements. Again and again you see and enjoy the same flexing of knee and poising of foot, the same curving of back and tossing of head, the same sweeping of hand and floating of drapery; and again and again the dancer moves through the same path of circling lines. Yet in these repetitions there are slight variations, too, because no human being works with the precision of a machine. And as you watch the dance you get variety without multiplicity; you see much with ease.

"Now, look here," cuts in some old-time producer, "you don't mean to say that you want our actors to dance through a drama, do you—a murder scene, or a wedding, or a meeting of profiteers to raise the price of soap?" No, indeed, we do not. In fact, we are hardly thinking of them as actors at all—not in this chapter. We are merely thinking of them as moving shapes upon a screen. And we want those shapes to move about in such a way that the motions will not hurt our eyes.

If we study those films that please us most we shall discover easy continuity of movement, so that a path of motion described in any one scene is extended, as it were, into a similar path of motion in the following

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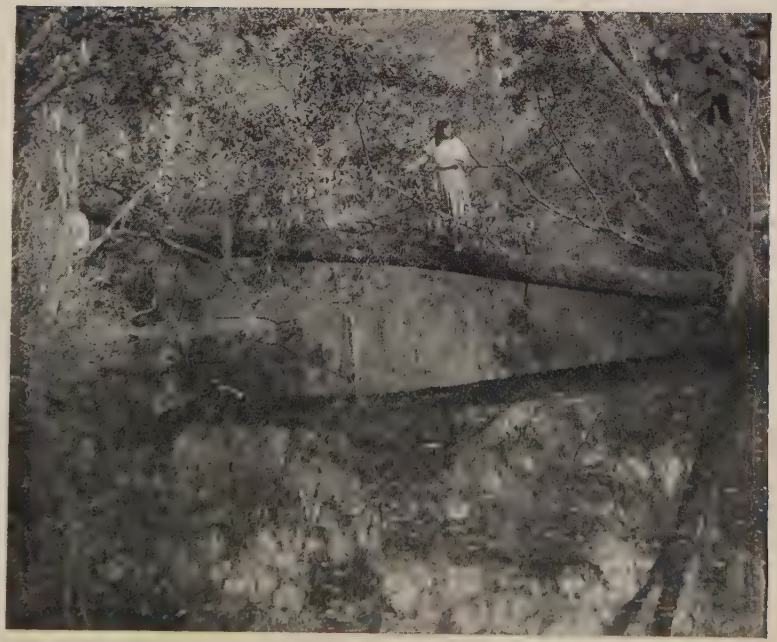

From *Audrey*. Cover up the left half of this picture and the lower half of the remaining part, and the quarter which then remains will contain a more pleasing and dramatic composition than that of the view taken as a whole. See pages 53 and 71.

scene. In such motion pictures there may be shifts, but there are no breaks. Paths of motion on the screen can remain long in our memories, as though they were fixed lines in a picture. Clearly, therefore, it would not be pleasing to have these remembered lines of motion clashing with those which are being perceived.

So much for the optical effects of single motions coming in succession. Now we must advance to the consideration of several motions going on in various directions during the same moment, which is a more usual situation in the photoplay. Several motions at once may constitute a harmony or a jumble, according to the first demands which they make upon the eye-work and brain-work of vision.

The difference between visual harmony and disharmony seems to depend partly on the fact that a pair of human eyes work together as one, and not as two separate instruments. You cannot look up with one eye and down with the other; you cannot look to the left with one eye and to the right with the other; you cannot look at a distant object with one eye and at a near one with the other. Hence, if you try to look intently at two or more objects crossing each other in opposite directions, your eyes are baffled and the effect is not pleasurable. There is also a conflict in our mental work of seeing, when opposing motions try to claim equal attention at the same time, unless, as we have previously stated, these motions are in some kind of rhythmical balance with each other.

Because of this baffling of eye and brain, therefore, we are displeased by the sight of two automobiles

passing each other in opposite directions, or by the crossing of an actor's gestures with the spoke of a wheel or the twig of a tree. A particularly ugly crossing is that of false and real motion, which even some of the best directors still indulge in. False, or apparent, motion occurs when the camera itself has been moving about while the picture was being taken. Thus a road is made to shoot upwards over the screen while our hero is riding madly toward us, or a parlor slides drunkenly to one side while some fair lady marches toward a door, or a stairway becomes a waterfall which she swims upstairs. The real motion, of course, contains the dramatic interest, but the false motion forces itself upon us by its novelty or unexpectedness; it becomes difficult for us to see much with ease, and the result is ugliness.

A particularly annoying device of recent vogue is the sub-title insert which is decorated with symbolical motions. It forces the spectator to read words and look at motions at the same time and upon the same spot of the screen. The Metro interpretation of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," beautiful in its photographed scenes, was spoiled by much ugliness of that kind. In one sub-title we must look at the Beast snorting and chopping his long jaws, while several lines of type are spread over his horrible movements. In others we see water flowing from the bottom of the screen toward the top, or we see a pin-wheel of sparks, to represent telegraphic messages going around the world, or we see a squirrel in his wheel-cage, to represent something or other, and in each of these cases we must also read words in glaring type blazed on top of the moving symbols.

Oppositions and conflicts baffle and bewilder the eye and mind, but concurrent co-operating motions please them. It is easy, for example, to look at the shower of fire from a sky rocket, because the lines move in similar directions and remain comparatively near together, each one, as it were, helping the others, so that what we see in one part of the motion is a key to the rest of the motion. There is a similar unity and rhythmical balance in the motion of a flock of birds, a school of fish, or a group of dancers, the billows of the sea, or the feathery fall of snowflakes.

The production of harmonious motions in a photoplay might seem to us spectators to be merely a matter of spying with a camera and catching views of harmonious actions and settings. But the problem is not so simple. For the movements within any given scene may be perfectly orchestrated with respect to each other, and yet may clash with every one of the movements in the following scene. If in one picture our eyes and minds have adjusted themselves to the delicate threading of snow-flakes, falling like a softly changing tapestry, they can only be shocked by a sudden jump to the vigorous curling of a sea wave breaking on the beach. And in our natural desire to appreciate both subjects at once we are disappointed to find that each has spoiled the other. Delicacy looks at power and thinks it violence; power looks at delicacy and thinks it weakness. It is a visual effect such as one would get from a drawing where the hair lines of the finest pen and thinnest ink were crossed by the coarse marks of a blunt piece of charcoal.

So sharp a contrast might have a certain dramatic, stirring effect, like the use of swear words in a

prayer; the very hurt might bring a certain thrill. An original and ingenious man, Mr. Griffith, for instance, may choose to show us a close-up of a little girl smiling in wistful innocence, her pretty curls quivering in the light breeze, contrasted suddenly with a reeking flood of soldiers pouring into a city street. Striking? Yes, exactly. The device is so striking that Mr. Griffith himself has learned to use it with restraint. Because once upon a time he composed a photoplay called "Intolerance," which was so full of striking contrasts that it failed. There were only a few thousand people in the world who could stand the strain of looking at it.

Thus as we analyze the optical aspects of a motion picture we are amazed at the number of things that may conspire to hurt our eyes, and we sympathize more than ever with the sincere cinema composer. He, the new hope of the movies, feels the need of other equipment than a line of talk and a megaphone. He no longer applies for a position in a studio on the strength of his record as an actor, as a stage director, as a city editor, as a college cheer leader, or as a drill sergeant in the army. He has begun to think in pictorial composition and not in words. He is never without his sketching pad and piece of charcoal, because, forsooth, his business is picture making. He makes hundreds of sketches by day, of shapes, and lines, and tones, and he goes over them again and changes them by night. His scenario contains almost as many drawings as words. He knows before he says "Good morning" to his queens and cut-throats just what places and spaces their figures will occupy during the pictorial climaxes, as well as during the

movements to, and away from, those climaxes. He sits among miles of films which he cuts, joins, runs through his projecting machine, and cuts and joins again. He knows that pictorial beauty does not come to the screen merely because the camera itself is a wonderful instrument. He knows, what so many critics are beginning to discover, that "the photography" may be excellent in a film, while its pictorial composition is atrocious. He knows first and last and always that, unless he makes his photoplay fundamentally pleasing to the eyes of the spectator, he can never give it the magic power of graphic art.

CHAPTER IV

PICTORIAL FORCE IN FIXED PATTERNS

FREQUENTLY while a director is rehearsing a photoplay scene he will sing out the command, "Hold it!" indicating thereby that the player has struck an attitude, or the players have woven themselves into a pattern, which is so expressive and beautiful that it deserves to be held for several seconds. What the camera then records will be shown on the screen as a striking pictorial moment, and, while it lasts, will appear as fixed as a painting.

But it is a peculiar psychological fact that such pictorial moments seem to occur in every movement, whether the actors have paused or not, the spectator seeing and remembering these arrested moments as though they were fixed pictures. This peculiar fact, that we remember fixed moments among continuous movements, has been discussed at some length in Chapter III of "The Art of Photoplay Making," and will, therefore, not be dwelt upon here. However, a single example may illustrate what we mean. Suppose we watch a diver stepping out upon a high springboard and diving into a pool. The whole feat is, of course, a movement without pause from beginning to end; yet our eyes will somehow arrest one moment as the most interesting, the most pictorial. It may be the moment when the diver is about midway be-

tween the springboard and the water, a moment when the body seems to float strangely upon the air. We are not unaware of the other phases of the dive, yet this particular moment impresses us; to it we apply our fine appraisal of form.

Similarly in a motion picture theater we unconsciously select moments from the action before us. These fleeting moments which fix themselves, so to speak, demand practically the same work (or shall we call it play?) from our eyes and minds as the momentarily fixed pictures which the director sometimes demands. At such times the whole pattern on the screen becomes as static as a painting, and its power or weakness, its beauty or lack of beauty, may be appreciated much as one would appreciate a design in a painting.

A painting enchants the beholder, not only by its color, but also by its lines and pattern. The peculiar power which resides in the arrangement of lines and masses has been studied by art critics for hundreds of years, and many of the principles which they have discovered might well be recalled by us in judging those moments of a motion picture which may be viewed as fixed designs. And what we learn by making such applications will help us greatly toward a better understanding of the beauty of pictorial motions on the screen.

By what visual processes do we grasp the meaning of a picture? What happens when we first look at the picture? And what happens as we continue looking? The answers, as nearly as can be ascertained, are as follows. When we face a picture our eyes first glance at some spot or region which is more attractive than all others, and then proceed to explore

the whole picture, ranging over all of its parts, and returning again to the center of attraction. In certain compositions this whole tour of inspection may be accomplished in one trip, and may be repeated at will, while in other compositions the inspection may require various side trips away from the center of interest to the outlying districts and back again. Of course, we are not aware that our eyes are doing all these things when we are at the movies, but that is what happens, just the same.

These visual processes take place in an exceedingly short time, usually only a fraction of a second, but they are real physical processes, nevertheless, subject to the laws of physical comfort and fatigue, and capable of being tested by the ordinary laws of physical efficiency.

Perhaps the first test, in this hectic age of ours, is speed. The quicker we can see and interpret a thing after we begin looking at it, the more satisfied we are. Another test is ease, or freedom from fatigue. The less energy we expend in looking, the more pleased we are. Hence, if the several parts of a picture can be quickly and easily seen and related to each other, the picture as a whole may be considered beautiful, providing it satisfies certain other demands, which will be analyzed later on.

Now suppose that we are at the movies and that some pictorial moment from the flowing action is arrested in our minds. If we are critical and feel like analyzing the effect of that arrested moment we may well ask such questions as the following:

What portion of that picture did we look at first, and why? Was that the spot which the cinema com-

poser desired us to see first? If not, how did he happen to mislead us and waste our time?

Where did our glances wander as we continued looking at the picture? Did they follow the lines which the cinema composer had mapped out? If not, what is wrong with his plan?

What part of the picture remains longest in memory? Does it coincide with the dramatic emphasis intended by the composer? If not, what caused the wrong accent?

Was the picture as a whole really beautiful to the eyes? If not, what made it displeasing?

Beginning with the first question, we may say that the attracting power of any portion of a picture depends upon many circumstances and conditions. For example, a patch of white on an area of dark will attract the eye, because it is natural for the eye to seek light in preference to dark. Hence, in the "still" from "Audrey" on page 45 we see the woman first; then we see the tree trunks, the reflections in the water, and the person half hidden in the bushes to the left. It is also natural for the eye to catch and follow the longest line in a composition. Therefore the trunk of the fallen tree in this picture helps to lead the eye to the woman. It is, furthermore, natural for the eye to follow two or more lines to a point where they meet. Therefore this picture would have given more emphasis to the woman if she had been placed near the root of the tree trunk, where many lines converge.

The spectator in the theater should be enabled to see the central interest at the very first instant of projection. Hence when the picture is being taken,

all lines of indication, gesture, draperies, etc., should be set, before the camera begins "shooting," and these lines should connect up with the paths of previously moving objects, so that the spectator's eyes may sweep at once to the central interest.

The need of this may be illustrated by a horrible example. Let us turn to the "still" on page 55. It is a safe bet that every one who looks at this picture will first see a long diagonal pole, one of the supports of the swing, because that is the longest, most striking line of the picture. The poles leaning together and the converging chains, though of no dramatic importance whatsoever, attract immediate attention to themselves, and also carry the eye to the two standing girls; which is clearly a mistake in composition, for the real interest evidently lies in the facial expressions of the man and woman, who are conversing with each other.

Students of pictorial design have discovered that, of all converging lines in a drawing, those which meet at right angles usually attract the eyes most strongly. Now if we look again at the "still" under discussion we will observe that there are many square corners in its composition, but that none of these angles coincide with any interest deserving of pictorial emphasis. Two of the strongest accents are at the square corners where the long pole and the brick curbing meet. Yet there is certainly no very exciting interest in that region. Hence our eyes wander thither in vain.

Let us speculate for a moment on what would happen to this composition if we remove the diagonal poles, chains, etc., and turn the swing into a seat.

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This "still" illustrates misplaced emphasis and several other defects in pictorial composition which characterized the general run of movies a few years ago. See page 54.

A specimen of bad composition, from an old film. The window is emphasized by its curious shape, by its central position, by its strong contrasts of black and white, and by the woman's gesture; yet this window has no dramatic significance whatsoever in the scene. See page 55.

The figures, even as they stand, would then form a not unpleasing rhythm, and the line of heads, with expressions helping to give direction, would lead to the heroine.

A glaring example of wrong emphasis caused by the attraction of a right-angled shape is to be seen in a "still" from "Other Men's Wives," on opposite page, where the window, toward which the woman unconsciously points her wand, irresistibly attracts the attention of the spectator. Is it not evident from even a cursory analysis of these "stills" that, though the directors may have given some thought to the poses and groupings of the performers, they have failed to realize that every other visible thing within scope of the camera must also be harmonized with the figures in order to keep the dramatic emphasis where it belongs?

Keeping in mind what we have just said about the visual accents of right angles we turn to a "still" from the "Spell of the Yukon," facing page 28. The window catches our eyes before anything else in the picture, both because of its square corners and because of its sharp contrasts of black and white. Though this distraction may be only for a brief moment, it is enough to keep our attention for that moment away from the man and boy, set in fine atmosphere.

It is only common sense to aim at making the visual interest of a picture coincide with the dramatic interest. And this can be done by controlling such means of attraction as we have just mentioned. When we look at the painting entitled "The Shepherdess," facing page 21, our glance falls immediately upon the shep-

herdess, because the almost vertical line of her body forms a cross with the horizontal line of the sheep's backs. Yet the design is so subtle that, unless we stop to analyze, we do not notice how the painter achieves his emphasis. We do not notice that the front of the woman's body is really a continuation of the left edge of a tree which extends to the top of the frame, that her profile is the continuation of a line of foliage from another tree, that her staff makes right angles with her throat and with the back of her head, that the rhythmical contours of a sheep flow into her left hand and arm, and that a shadow from the lower center of the picture leads to her feet.

If a painter establishes his emphasis so carefully in a picture which the beholder may regard for hours at a time, it would seem all the more urgent for a cinema composer to study out the correct emphasis for a pictorial moment which the spectator must grasp in only a second or two. It is extremely important, for the simple reason that, if the director does not deliberately draw the attention of the spectator to the dramatic interest in the picture, it is most likely that accident will emphasize some other part, as we have seen in the examples already discussed; and then, before the spectator has time to reason himself away from the false emphasis to the true interest, the action will go on to some other scene, and a part of the real message will be lost.

Let us illustrate this again by turning to another "still" from "The Spell of the Yukon," facing page 57. The thing which attracts first and longest is the strange object in the upper left-hand corner. On

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From *The Spell of the Yukon*. There are too many distracting shapes in the left end of this picture. Mask over the cabin, the sleigh, and the two dogs farthest to the left, and the remaining part of the picture becomes a pleasing composition of line, shape, and tone. See page 56.

the screen our eyes would wander away to the dogs and the man, but they would wander back again to that strange shape, because it is a law of visual attention that the strangest and most unfamiliar shape attracts most strongly. We would be curious about that shape, and by the time we had decided that it was an Alaskan sled, the picture would fade out and we would have missed the message, namely the affectionate companionship of the man and his dogs.

If the sled had been more completely shown, or viewed from a different angle, or placed in a more natural position immediately behind a team of dogs, it would not have seemed strange and distracting. This composition could be greatly improved by simply eliminating the left third of it. If you cover up the sled and the two dogs nearest it with a sheet of paper you will see that what remains is a fairly pleasing arrangement, with considerably more emphasis on the man and the theme of his affection for the dogs, with a better pattern and more rhythmical lines.

If the director had simplified his composition as we have suggested he might have eliminated the wrong emphasis and secured the right emphasis in one stroke. The dark figure of the man framed roughly in white and gray would have attracted attention by its tonal isolation. Emphasis by isolation involves simplicity and economy, and for that very reason, perhaps, this device is so often neglected by less experienced directors. They breathe the poisonous air of extravagance and thrash their arms in the heretical belief that multiplicity is power. Compare, for instance, the "still" of "Polly of the Circus," facing page 79, with "The Banquet of the Officers of St.

Andrew," by Frans Hals, facing page 79, and you get at once the distinct impression that Hals's picture depicts a larger crowd than the "still." But you will be astonished to find that the painting actually contains but twelve men, while the "still" contains seventeen men, one woman, and one horse.

In the painting every head is isolated by hat, ruff, costume, or panel, and seems to have plenty of room to move freely without bumping. Our eyes can study the contours and values of those heads without colliding with other interests. And the fact that each head is treated almost as though it were a separate portrait might be called a trick of design which makes us overestimate the number in the group, thus getting the impression of a throng. Surely this is good economy. Compare it with the extravagant composition of the circus crowd. There you see heads and bodies huddled together in a meaningless jumble. No interest is significantly framed, no two interests are properly spaced. The director may have swelled the wage roll, but he has shrivelled the art product. Perhaps it is not necessary to go further in support of our contention that certain visual values and devices of arrangement can be used, separately or in combination, to control the glances of spectators, and that, unless these means are properly used, pictorial impressiveness cannot be obtained. We have discussed the uses of a bright patch on a generally dark ground, long converging lines, crosses, sharp contrasts of tone and color, unfamiliar shapes, and isolation of subject. Scores of other principles of design, well known to painters, might be used to emphasize a screen picture during that moment of the action when all movement seems to have

stopped. Of course, when the movement is actually or apparently resumed, emphasis will be controlled according to the laws by which motion appeals to the eye. But that is a subject for another chapter.

To continue our analysis of fixed design, let us examine the methods whereby various pictorial elements may be fused into a unity. Every writer knows that a sentence is really a train of words which, though actually standing still on the paper, can carry the reader's mind swiftly across the page. By various literary devices the reader's interest is caught and carried from emphasis to emphasis, and by various devices the reader's thoughts may be organized into a complete unity. So, too, the lines and shapes of a picture, however still they may stand for the moment on the screen have the power to carry the spectator's eyes from interest to interest; and they may, if properly designed, guide his attention through the picture in such a way as to gather all of its parts into a complete unity.

When the eyes are caught by something in a picture, they do not at first rest there, but proceed, as we have said, on a tour of inspection of the whole area within the frame of that picture, after which they return again to the first visual interest. In making this tour the eyes seek, or at least, follow a pattern. Let us test these statements by turning to the "still" facing page 61. You cannot see every point of the picture at once. Therefore your eyes range over it. Perhaps, now that we call your attention to it, you can feel your eyes moving as they follow the outlines of the white mass which is produced by the girl's figure and dress. To make sure that you feel these movements, just look

quickly from her head to her foot, to her right hand, to her head again, etc. Now you realize that the white mass is contained in a distinct triangle. That triangle is the pattern of the picture. Whether you like it or not makes no difference; the triangular path must be followed by your eyes.

This little exercise shows that the eyes, unlike the lens of a camera, cannot see every part of a picture at once, but must range over it from point to point, repeating the tour again and again as long as the picture is in view. But, if we cannot see head, hand, and foot at once, it is evident that we must remember the head while we are observing the hand, that we must remember both the head and the hand while we are observing the foot, etc., else the whole picture could never be built up in our minds. It is also evident that the smoother the path, the more easily and quickly can the tour of inspection be made.

The eye needs paths, finger-posts, and bridges to carry it from one part of a picture to another, a need which painters discovered ages ago, and responded to by uniting the lines of their drawings into some sort of image or design. Thus the old masters often constructed their paintings on the design of a circle, a rectangle, a triangle, a diamond, a right-angled cross, an X shape, an S curve, or some other equally simple pattern, finding by experience that this practice always helped the beholder to grasp the picture as a unity. But they were real magicians, those medieval masters, and as such knew how to conceal their designs. Their technique, which the probing critic lays bare, is neither seen nor suspected by the average beholder who stands worshipful before their paintings. In fact, the tech-

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A Triangle. The fundamental pattern in a picture should not be obtrusive, as in this too obviously triangular shape. Compare this "still" with the illustration facing page 76. See also pages 59, 72 and 76.

nique of graphic design can be effective only when it works subconsciously in the spectator's mind. Furthermore, those old masters knew how to achieve many results through simple means. They knew how to produce unity, emphasis, balance, and rhythm by the skillful manipulation of even a single device.

By contrast many motion picture directors of to-day are mere bunglers. For example, in the "still" portrait which we have just studied there is unity and a definite, though heavy, equilibrium, but there is no rhythm, and the emphasis is sadly misplaced. The pose of the woman and her relation to the rug and the background admittedly make a unity. Our eyes ranging over the triangle, can easily grasp all that is important in the picture and leave out the rest; but the triangular design is severe and makes a wrong emphasis. In the first place, the design is too obviously a triangle. We think of it as a mathematical figure, and thus waste part of the attention which should be directed upon the woman herself. And, in the second place, the accent is at the wrong corner and on the wrong side of the triangle. The base of the triangle is accented by containing the longest line in the composition, the line being further emphasized by its straightness and by the sharp contrast between black and white which it marks. This emphasis is, of course, wrong, for we are certainly not interested in the pattern of this rug. There is also no reason why our attention should be called to the woman's foot, or to the adjacent corner of the white panel in the rug, yet our glance is attracted to that region by the strange zigzag line described by the slipper and that white corner. These accents are wrong at first glance, and they remain wrong as long as the picture

lasts, because every time we repeat the tour of inspection our eyes rest a moment on these false interests.

To show that these mistakes lie entirely in the treatment, and not in the device of the triangle, we need only turn to the painting of "Mme. Lebrun and Her Daughter," facing page 76. Here is a composition distinctly triangular in design, yet one may have admired this picture hundreds of times without observing that fact. Here is unity, without obviousness or severity. Our eyes leap to the apex of the triangle, and there find the chief interest, the head of the mother. And, as we continue gazing, our attention still favors the mother, because the white areas of her shoulder, arm, and robe attract the eye more strongly than the other portions of the picture. Here, too, is graceful balance and a flowing rhythm in every line.

If we consider merely the dramatic action of the subjects, as the motion picture directors so often do, we observe that the poses in Mme. Lebrun's painting are natural and easy, that the gesture is graceful and telling, and we realize how completely and impressively the technique of design, the craft of composition, expresses the message of the painter.

A part of Mme. Lebrun's technique consisted in eliminating the setting, because in this particular case she found it easier to express her meaning without describing environment. Setting may often well be eliminated in the movies, too, as in "Moon-Gold," discussed below; but usually the physical environment of action, as has been stated rather exhaustively in Chapter VIII of "The Art of Photoplay Making," can be dramatized more vividly in the movies than in any other narrative art. And it is an interesting problem

of design to weave places into a definite unity with persons, things, and action.

Let us see how this problem has been met in the cabin scene of "The Spell of the Yukon," facing page 28, which, in spite of the too conspicuous window, already spoken of, has a rather successful pictorial arrangement. For the sake of experiment, this "still" may be analyzed by making a simple drawing, as in the sketch facing page 28. We see that the design consists essentially of an oval shape surrounded by rectangles. The rectangles may be seen in the lines of the window, the bunk, the table, etc. The oval, which includes all of the dramatic action, may be traced from the boy's head, down the boy's arm to the man's right knee and leg, up the man's left hand, arm, and shoulder to his head, and thence across to the boy's head again. In the center of this oval is the hand holding a pipe and making a telling gesture in the story.

This oval design, taken by iself, is an excellent composition. The lines furnish easy paths for the eye, and bind the boy and man together into a dramatic unity. There is, to be sure, only an imaginary line between the faces of the man and the boy, but that imaginary line is nevertheless as vivid as any visible thing in the picture. In fact, the break in the visible part of the oval serves to arrest our attention upon the faces for a moment every time our glance swings through the oval pattern. Leading toward this oval are the straight lines of the bunk and the table, thus serving to give unity and force. But the lines of the window make an isolated pattern which, instead of leading one's eye toward the dramatic focus, does just the opposite. The

design, as a whole, therefore, is imperfect. And, though we see much in the picture, we do not see it entirely with ease.

If we turn to "Derby Day," facing this page, a drawing by the English artist, Thomas Rowlandson, we shall find a more interesting design and a surer control of accents. Here the basic theme is a long line. By "line" in this case we mean, not merely a single stroke of the pencil, but any succession of lines, shapes, or even spots, so arranged that they make a track for the eye to follow. In "Derby Day" the long swinging line of the road is the basis of the design. Yet this line is not quite identical with the wheel tracks. It begins, in fact, with the feet of the donkey at the lower right-hand corner of the frame, and follows through the dog, the baskets under the wagon, the hub of the wheel, then over the heads of the group, through the hubs of the third wagon, then with a slight downward drop it swings along the edge of the field and the hedge, and finally leads through the horses and wagons, out at the left end of the picture.

Upon this line the whole design is built, and rather cleverly, too, for our attention is controlled by the subtle ordination of accents. At the right end of the line is the most unusual and striking shape in the picture, namely, the curved figure described by the wagon-cover and the wheel. Such a strange shape, as we have pointed out earlier in this chapter, has a strong attraction for the eye, and in this picture marks emphasis Number One. Emphasis Number Two occurs near the middle of the road at the turn, where four or more lines meet to form a cross. These lines are produced by the basic line already described, by the consp. uous

Derby Day, a drawing by Thomas Rowlandson, showing the kind of composition which could be effectively used in photoplays. See page 64.

Analysis of the fundamental design in *Derby Day* (above). See page 64.

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tree, and by the hedge which runs up to it from the left side of the bottom frame. Here again are illustrated visual laws already discussed. The third emphasis in this picture is where the road runs out on the left, our eyes being drawn in that direction by the familiar device of converging lines. Observe that the mass of trees in the background forms a distinct wedge with the point toward the left, that the wagon train itself tapers sharply, that the three trees along the road are successively smaller toward the left, and that the field on that side of the road tapers somewhat in the same direction. The combined effect of these converging lines and tapering shapes carries our vision along the road so insistently that we follow it in imagination beyond the frame.

Thus by the magic of pictorial design our vision is caught and so controlled that a single glance, sweeping the picture in the direction ordained by the artist, gives us a definite feeling of movement. No matter who looks, or how often, he will see the accents in the order we have named—covered wagon, turn of the road, far end of the road—and will thus get the main story of the picture in the shortest time, the simplest terms, and with the right emphasis. If this picture were to be thrown upon the screen for only a second we are confident that every spectator would instantly get the primary meaning, (1) wagon loads of merrymakers (2) are swinging (3) up the road. There are minor interests, too, such as the comic figures and actions of the characters, the prancing of dogs and horses, the rustic cottage, the tops of trees, clouds, etc.; but these are kept subsidiary in the design and yet, as they emerge one by one, they are found to be

in complete harmony with the main theme, the movement of merry-makers along a country road.

Of course, if a scene like this were filmed and thrown upon the screen, the wagon train would actually be moving, and we would perceive the motion, rather than infer it or feel it, as we do from the fixed design of the drawing. Yet, if the cinema director were indifferent as to where he placed his accents, and trusted to chance for his pictorial pattern, we would surely not perceive that motion in its full significance. Now, if lines, shapes and tonal values in a certain arrangement can clarify and emphasize the message of a picture, it is obvious that in some other arrangement they could obscure and minimize that message. For example, if "Derby Day" were filmed, and the composition were left to accident or to the bungling of some director ignorant of the laws of design, it is quite probable that he would "feature" the "picturesque" cottage, or perhaps a "cunning" dog, a "scenic" tree, the "patriotic pull" of the flag, or the "side-splitting" corpulency of a woman. No spectator would then see or feel the dominant idea of this subject, which is the joy of going away on the open road.

Right here it is a pleasure to state for the benefit of any reader who may not have seen "The Covered Wagon," that James Cruze, the director of that photoplay, did not bungle his composition. Always the historic wagon train of the pioneers strikes the dominant note of the scene, seeming to compose itself spontaneously into a pictorial pattern which accents the dramatic meaning. This is true even when there is no physical movement. In the arroyo scene,

for example, facing page 93, the wagons, drawn up into formation for a camp, harmonize sternly with the savage-looking cliffs, and their zig-zag arrangement somehow suggests the sharp action of the fight with the Indians which fate holds in store for this very place.

Enough has now been said to illustrate how design in a picture can control our attention during the pauses and arrested moments on the screen, and by so doing can relieve the eyes of unnecessary, wasteful work and give unity and emphasis to the message of the picture. But still other powers reside in design. While it hastens our grasp of meanings, and even accentuates those meanings, it can affect the mind in other ways that are still more important. And if we delve deeper into these ways we shall come out with a clearer vision of the artistic possibilities of the movies.

CHAPTER V

RYTHM AND REPOSE IN FIXED DESIGN

DIRECTNESS, ease, emphasis, unity—these are the things which we have just demanded of cinema composition, the pictorial form which contains, and at the same time reveals, the story of a photoplay. But we demand something more. We do not get complete æsthetic pleasure from any composition which merely contains and reveals something else. The vessel, while serving to convey its treasure, should have a charm of its own. In poetry, for example, we are not satisfied with the language which merely expresses the poetic content in clear and forceful style. We crave poetic language, too, words and sentences that sound like music and that by their very form appeal to our fancy.

In fact most people who have a highly developed taste for pictorial art, consider that beauty of treatment is more important than beauty of subject. Their emotions are stirred by something in the arrangement of the lines, masses, tones, and colors, something that serves other purposes than those of clearness, coherence, and emphasis. What that something is, has always been a great question to students of æsthetics. Mr. Clive Bell, for example, suggests that the essential beauty of art lies in "significant form." But you

have to read through his very interesting book entitled "Art" to get some notion of what he means by that term. Miss Ethel D. Puffer, in her book "The Psychology of Beauty," has developed the very illuminating theory that the effect of beauty on the human mind is both to stimulate and give repose. And we shall adopt her theory for a while as a basis for a brief discussion of rhythm and balance in cinematic forms.

The terms "stimulation and repose," are, of course, contrary. The feelings which they describe are in conflict. Yet this inner conflict between stimulation and repose always takes place when a person is faced with great beauty of art or nature. Any one of us can testify to that from experience. When listening to music, when reading a poem, when watching a play, when gazing at a temple, at a statue, or a painting, we have felt something strangely stirring and at the same time soothing, something both kindling and cooling, an inspiration to do great deeds, and at the same time a desire to rest for the while in satisfied contemplation.

Applying this theory to pictorial composition on the screen, we may say that the quality of balance in line, pattern, and tone suggests repose, while pulsating rhythm stimulates us to activity. This application at least has the merit of giving us something definite to discuss.

Looking at the mechanical aspects of balance in a picture we shall see that it can easily be analyzed. There is the balance of quantity which may be seen by comparing the right half of the picture with the left half, or the upper half with the lower half. Bal-

ance of quantity is often connected with symmetry in the fundamental pattern, as in the figure of the triangle. Further, there is balance through depth, the foreground weighing against the background. Another kind of balance is that of echoing motifs, a sort of fulfillment of the eye's expectations. There is also a balance of interests, which is quite different from the balance of quantity, because a small quantity of one thing may have greater weight of interest than a large quantity of something else. And there is the balance of contrasts, such as light against shadow, or straight lines against curved lines. How balance in all of these forms may be obtained in cinema composition will be discussed in the first half of this chapter.

One of the simplest tests for balance in a static picture is to draw a vertical line through the center of the picture, and then to estimate the weight, so to speak, of the two halves of the composition thus formed. If we try the experiment with the "still" from the photoplay "Maria Rosa," facing page 71, we see at once that the left half is too heavy. Besides containing by far the greater dramatic interest, it contains too many objects, shapes, and lines to attract the eye.

Now if this "still" were a student's painting which fell under the eye of the master, he might suggest various ways of "saving" it. For example, some of the bric-a-brac might be "painted out" from the dressing table, the lower lines of the mirror might be softened, and the door reflected in the mirror might be painted out, while some similar interest might be painted in at the right of the picture. Or if this "still"

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From *Maria Rosa.* An interesting composition, but thrown out of balance by too much weight in the left half. See page 70.

were an amateur print for your kodak album, you might improve the picture considerably by trimming off the right end as far as the woman's skirt; that is, about one-fifth of the entire width. You can estimate the value of that improvement right now by shutting off that part of the "still" with a sheet of paper or any convenient thing that may be used as a mask, Another picture may be formed by shutting off the left third, just including the reflection of the woman in the mirror. What then remains is a composition in beautiful balance, which, incidentally, appeals more strongly to the imagination than the "still" taken as a whole.

But neither trimming nor repainting nor retouching can be employed to alter a bad grouping that has been recorded on a film. We sympathize, therefore, with the conscientious cinema composer who has made a mistake in composition, for he is forced either to "shoot" the scene again or to clip it out entirely from the film.

Another test for balance of quantity is to draw a horizontal line through the center of the composition and weigh the visual values in the upper and lower halves thus formed. In the case of horizontal divisions, however, we have accustomed ourselves to expect greater weight at the bottom, because that is the natural arrangement of material things about us. Keeping this fact in mind let us analyze the "still" from "Audrey," facing page 45. A glance shows us that the composition is top-heavy, for almost everything of interest lies above the center line. But turn the picture upside down, and look upon it as though it were a pattern meant to be viewed in that position;

you feel immediately that the distribution of weights is more pleasing. Now hold it as if the right end were the bottom, and the composition takes on a heavy balance, with a commonplace symmetry of four long, rising and spreading lines. This is so because the right half, which is really too heavy when the picture is viewed in the position intended by the director, seems to be a weight in place when considered as the bottom of a pattern.

Yet we may find beauty in this "still," if we only have the patience to corner it. Cover up three-quarters of the composition, that is, all of the left half, and all of the lower half; then the remaining quarter will contain a pleasant composition, and a delightful appeal to the imagination. There is in that upper right-hand quarter, both balance and rhythm, both repose and stimulation. The heroine's gestures carry our attention to the left, in the direction she is going; but her glances, and the attracting power of the converging trees, carry our attention to the right. And in the course of this easy playing to and fro our fancy swings out beyond the frame into realms of our own imagination.

But there is still another test for pictorial equilibrium. Besides the balance of one side against the other and of the top against the bottom, a picture should preserve a balance between the foreground and the background. This assumes that the picture really suggests the dimension of depth, which is usually the case. Interesting exceptions, however, may appear occasionally, as in the "still" facing page 61, and the painting facing page 76. One may even find entire photoplays with scenes done in two dimensions only.

For example, "Moon-Gold," a Will Bradley production, released in 1921, presents a story of Pierrot, Columbine, and Harlequin in a series of scenes in a single plane. There is no background except blackness, and there is no foreground at all. The pictures are as flat as a poster. Such elimination of setting may have artistic merit, especially in stories of familiar or naïve themes, but in more involved stories it is desirable to include the whole setting of the action, not only because of the dramatic power of environment, but also because of the pictorial wealth which may thus be added.

To test this third balance of a picture you need only imagine a curtain of glass dropped so as to separate equally the interests near the spectator from those farther away. Such a plane is, in fact, usually imagined by a painter when he lays out his design. Though he does not cut his ground mechanically into two equal areas, he usually does distribute his subjects so that the spectator needs not feel that the foreground is only a long waste to be crossed, or that the background is but an empty region which lies beyond everything of interest.

The word "depth" in connection with the screen has doubtless made our readers think of the stereoscopic motion picture as produced by the Teleview and other companies. Such pictures are truly remarkable in their mechanical power of showing physical depth through a scene. They show you the images clearly separated, some near and some far away, so that you feel as if you could really walk in and out among them. To be able to produce such an illusion is something that any inventor may well be

proud of; and yet it is doubtful that the stereoscopic picture will bring about any improvement in the artistic composition of the motion picture. Most of us can recall the "stereoscope and views" which we used to find on the center tables of our country aunts. How well we remember the mystifying illusion of depth which was created. How well we remember also that there was the same depth in the reeking stockyards of Kansas City as in the cathedral aisle of Rheims! That illustrates the shortcoming of purely mechanical things in the service of art. The stereoscopic machinery cannot in itself create beauty. It cannot automatically so select trees or distribute people over a landscape that balance and rhythm, unity and emphasis will appear in the finished picture. Unfortunately, for the uninspired artist, the mechanician cannot help him.

It may be asked whether stereoscopic pictures may not be utilized to get sculptural effects upon the screen. The answer is that if a piece of sculpture had to be viewed through a single peep-hole and under an unchanging light it would not really have a sculptural appeal. The characteristic appeal of sculpture is due largely to the fact that it is possible for the beholder to shift his gaze at will from one side of the statue to the other. He even walks around the statue, thus getting ever new aspects of the subject until he has completed the circle of inspection. And this shifting view is governed entirely by his own interest and choice. The sculptor has deliberately shaped his marble so that the many aspects will be interesting variations of the same theme. That many-sidedness of sculpture is one of its distinctive qualities as art.

But when you look at a stereoscopic motion picture it is absolutely impossible for you to "see around" the objects any farther than the camera has done, no matter how much you shift your position. The other sides of all the objects and figures might as well be missing. Your point of view is fixed absolutely in the stereoscopic picture, just as it is in the ordinary "flat" picture. But perhaps there are other ways in which the Teleview and similar inventions can provide new opportunities for the cinema artist. That remains to be shown by experimentation, and, of course, such experimentation is welcome and should be encouraged.

However, for all purposes of pictorial art a sufficient illusion of depth can be produced in the "flat" picture. This can be done by the simplest instruments and means of picture making, even by the use of a lead pencil and a piece of paper. There are only two secrets of perspective. One is to render parallel lines, that is, lines which are actually parallel in the subject, so that they converge in the distance and, if continued, would meet at a "vanishing point." The other is to render objects with increasing dimness as they occupy positions at increasing distances away from us.

One might suppose that in a photograph these problems of perspective would take care of themselves. But they do not, as may be seen by turning to the "still" of the conservatory scene, facing page 100. There we find a jumble of stuff apparently all in the same vertical plane. Why does the standing woman wear a palm leaf in her hair? Why does the man wear the top of a doorway upon his head? And why

does the seated woman bury her head in the ferns? They do not actually, of course, carry on thus hilariously; but some one has carelessly coaxed the background into the foreground by making remote objects intensely distinct, instead of subduing them into the soft values of distance.

But we have dwelt so long on the subject of balance in design that we fear the reader may think we have over-emphasized the point. No one quality in pictorial composition should be out of balance with the others. Thus, too sharp an emphasis may violate balance, and too perfect a balance may violate rhythm. After all, the kind of balance we desire in pictorial design is that which is sufficient, but no more. We do not, as a rule, enjoy the mathematical figure of the equilateral triangle, standing heavily on its base, because it is balanced beyond the need of any living thing. It suggests the dead repose of the pyramids of Egypt, the tombs of her forgotten kings. Such a severe design is utterly unsuitable, therefore, in the portrait of a lithe young lady clad in silks and tulle, as illustrated in the "still" facing page 61. It is flat and hard, and the eye following forever its monotonous outlines misses the variety of rhythm. Yet a triangle, you say, serves the purpose of unity and emphasis. Alter it then by making it narrower, with a less obvious base, and by swinging a live rhythm into its sides, as in the painting of "Mme. Lebrun and Her Daughter," facing this page.

But this brings us to a discussion of the mysterious quality of rhythm. Rhythm is entirely too evasive for a tight definition, but perhaps we can learn much by saying things about it.

Mme. LeBrun and Her Daughter, a painting by Mme. Vigée-Lebrun. A good figure composition on the basis of a triangle. Compare with the "still" shown facing page 61. See also pages 62 and 76.

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Rhythm in music may be partially described as a peculiar alternating movement, with an alternation between sounds of different pitch, quality, and quantity; between different sound groups, and between sound and silence. The rhythm of visible motion is of a somewhat similar nature, as we shall see in Chapter VIII. But a sense of alternating movement may be produced by things which are not themselves in motion. We can, therefore, find rhythm in fixed lines, shapes, tones, colors, and textures. This we shall call rhythm of fixed design.

The peculiar thing about the element of alternation in rhythm which distinguishes it from mere repetition, is that it is not regular, like the swinging of a pendulum, but contains numerous variations from regularity. But, while the symmetry of rhythm is only partial, so also the variety is limited. It is the combined effect of these two factors which makes rhythm delightful. Repetition or symmetry in a line or a pattern is pleasurable because, as explained in Chapter III, it enables us to see much with ease. But, at the same time, subtle or even bold variations are appealing because they relieve us of monotony, stimulate our interest, and lead our eyes in search of further variations.

A familiar rhythm of line is that of the reverse curve, which Hogarth called "the line of beauty." This line is beautifully used in the painting "Daylight and Lamplight," facing page 39. Observe the effect of alternation with variety in the lines which bound the urn, the woman's figure, and the various shadows and lights in the background. Your eye sweeps over those paths without effort, and you get a sense of movement,

as though you yourself were drawing these lines with a brush or crayon. Analyze the composition and you will see how richly the lines are woven together. Compare all the small curves with each other, compare all the larger curves, all the short straight lines, all the longer straight lines, etc., and you will discover an amazing amount of alternation and repetition, with an equally amazing amount of deviation from regularity.

Imagine that the painting which we have just analyzed is an accented moment in a motion picture, and you must imagine another similar design a few seconds earlier in the action and still another one a few seconds later, as the woman walks gracefully through the room. In fact, there would be a whole series of similar designs during the brief time that the woman's figure and the urn are in decorative contact. The instant of action which the painter has chosen to fix on canvas might well be the same instant which you would select as the pictorial climax in this motion picture. This climax, accented perhaps with a pause, accented also by the pictorial approach and departure, is something which you would long remember as a rhythmical moment in the photoplay.

In the picture which we have just described the rhythm is found chiefly in the continuity and richness of line and in a certain active balancing of similar with dissimilar lines. The design is simple, almost plain. It is a single pattern which does not recur again within the frame. Quite different in type is the composition of a group picture such as "The Banquet of the Officers of St. Andrew," facing page 79, where the rhythm is in the flow of patterns rather than in

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From *Polly of the Circus.* Compare this "still" with *Banquet of the Officers of St. Andrew* (below) and you get at once the distinct impression that the painting depicts a larger crowd than the "still." As a matter of fact, the painter has used only twelve men to produce his effect, while the motion picture director has employed seventeen men, a woman, and a horse. This difference illustrates the practical utility of pictorial design. See page 57.

Banquet of the Officers of St. Andrew, a painting by Frans Hals. See above and page 78.

the flow of lines. Take a hat, for example, as the decorative theme and observe how definitely, yet how subtly, that theme is four times varied. Note further how the curves of the hats are echoed, always with variety, in the ruffs.

But so many curves would make the picture too rich in quality were it not for the skillful introduction of straight lines to make, as it were, a series of alternating notes. You observe immediately the long straight lines of the windows, of the two flags, and of the table. But you do not at first observe that there are several dozen shorter straight lines, and that, curiously enough, they are nearly all parallel to each other. Take as a key the sash of the first seated officer, counting from the left, and you will find a surprising number of similarities to this motif throughout the composition, all the way from the shadows on the window casing in the upper left hand corner to the edge of the table in the lower right hand corner. Yet, because these similar straight lines are so frequently alternated with varying curves, we get from the picture a stirring sense of a swinging movement.

Here, again, is an arrested moment of action which might conceivably have come out of a motion picture. What the arrangement of the twelve men might have been at other moments of the scene we do not know. Perhaps they were all sitting when the scene opened; perhaps they had all arisen before it closed; but for this one instant, at least, they have resolved themselves into an interesting design of simple patterns in a rhythmical series.

Another source of rhythm in a fixed picture may be the tonal gradations. In a painting there would be

a play of colors from hue to hue and from tint to shade. In ordinary photography there may be a similar play from deep black to intense white through all the intervening values. It is all a question of lighting and choice of subjects for the light to fall upon. The painter has an advantage over the photographer because he does not have to record light and shadow exactly as they are on the subject. He can soften his shadows or paint them out completely. He can alter his tones and values at will, even after the painting is practically finished. As an offset to this the cinema composer has, of course, the power of presenting movement, fugues and passages of light and shadow. And, by the use of the newest apparatus for lighting, and by careful attention to the color values and textures of sets, costumes, etc., he can also produce many of the rhythmical effects of gradation in fixed tones which we are accustomed to look for in painting.

As time goes on we shall more and more often find pictorial moments on the screen which exhibit as fine a rhythm of fixed tones and masses as, for example, Van Dyck's "Portrait of Charles I," facing page 163. If you draw a straight line across this picture in almost any direction, it will mark a great variety of graded values, a lovely shifting of light and shadow, with no sharp contrasts except those which serve to attract the spectator's attention to the head of the king. There is perfect harmony of composition here. The tones are in a rhythmical design, yet it is a rhythm which keeps the emphasis on the focal interest and preserves the balance throughout the painting.

Two or three men, a horse, and a bit of landscape is no uncommon subject in photoplays. We have rea-

son, therefore, to expect that from long practice all directors will learn how to treat it pictorially, and with ever new variety of beauty.

The general field of composition in fixed design has now been surveyed. We have tried to show that a good pictorial composition, even from a commercial point of view, is one which provides instant emphasis on the focal interest; which unites this focal interest with the other parts of the picture by means of a certain arrangement, or pattern; which keeps all of its values in a reposeful balance, and which pulsates with a vital rhythm. These four qualities—emphasis, unity, balance, and rhythm—are necessary in what might be called the mechanics of beauty, the technique of design. We admit, cheerfully, that the beauty of a given masterpiece cannot be explained by pointing out an observance of certain fundamental laws of design, for an uninspired artist might obey all these laws without ever achieving beauty, just as a machinist might obey all the laws of mechanics without ever inventing a machine. But we insist that an observance of pictorial laws is a first condition that must be fulfilled by the artist before the mysterious quality of beauty will arise in his work.

The accented moment in a pictorial movement, which we have studied from so many angles, is, of course, not fixed on the screen for any great length of time, never for more than a few seconds, though it may remain fixed in memory for years. Nor is it a separate thing upon the screen. It rises from an earlier moment and flows into a later one. The rapid succession of momentarily fixed pictures on the screen is, in fact, what gives the illusion of motion. Yet it

would not, therefore, be correct to say that the motion picture as a whole can be made beautiful by making each separate exposure in itself a beautiful composition. The successive pictures must play, one into the the next, in a stream of composition which contains new delights for the eye, and which, alas, contains new dangers for the ignorant or careless maker of pictures. What these delights and dangers are we shall see in the following chapters.

CHAPTER VI

MOTIONS IN A PICTURE

PICTORIAL motion is thousands of years older than the motion picture. It is as old as the oldest art of all, the dance. Before man had learned how to weave his own fancies into plots, or how to make drawings of things that he saw, he had doubtless often feasted his eyes upon the rhythmic beauty created by dancers. Their art was the composition of motions. We can well imagine how they began by exhibiting bodily postures, gestures, and mimicry; how they proceeded to add other movements, such as the fluttering of garments, the brandishing of weapons, the waving of flaring torches, and how they, in time, made their composition more involved by swinging themselves into swaying groups, circling and threading fanciful patterns.

As a form of art the dance has been preserved through the ages in an apparently unbroken history. And it has had various off-shoots besides; for religious and secular processions, pantomime, and even drama, have had their beginnings in the dance. Pictorial motion was to be seen two thousand years ago in the Roman triumphs and processions, whose gaudiest features survive in the familiar circus parade of today.

And the circus itself is in a sense the pictorial motion of animals and men.

In the presentation of drama, too, pictorial motion has always played a vital part. When we look back over the history of the theater we see that the managers were never satisfied with the mere physical exhibition of actors and dancers, but began very early to add other motions to their performance. A large variety of motions was added by bringing animals upon the scenes. Fire was put into the service of show. We know that its flame and flicker, borne in torches or beating upon the witches' caldron, was not uncommon on Shakespeare's stage. Water in the form of leaping cascades and playing fountains was used at least two hundred years ago to make the scene more pictorial. More recently, wind has been produced artificially in order to give motion to draperies, flags, or foliage.

All this amounts to something far more than an attempt to bring nature upon the stage. It is the creation of new beauty. The kind of beauty which professional entertainers have for thousands of years spun together from various motions into patterns simple or subtle, is the beauty of art, for it comes from human personality expressing itself in forms and combinations never found as such in nature.

Now, if these showmen are really artists, at least in intent, we may well ask how they have combined their motions so as to produce the pleasing effects which they desired. Have they worked hit-or-miss and achieved beauty only by accident, or have they intentionally or instinctively obeyed certain laws of the human eye and mind?

How does the director of a motion picture make sure that pleasing motion will appear upon the screen? Does he alter, or select, his subjects? Does he choose his point of view? Does he patiently wait for the right moment? Or must beauty come by accident, as music might come from a cat's running over the keyboard of a piano?

There must be laws of pictorial motion, just as there are laws of color, design, modelling, architectural construction, all of which appeal to the eye without visible motion. And, since the motion picture can capture and combine and reproduce a greater variety of moving things than was ever before possible in the history of art, it seems particularly important that we make earnest efforts to find out under what laws these manifold motions may be organized into art.

In studying the movies one might easily come to the conclusion that some directors aim only to make motions life-like. Their whole creed seems to be that a heart-broken woman should move her shoulders and chest as though she really were heart-broken, that a goat should act exactly like a goat, and that a windmill should behave itself exactly like a windmill. Now, it may be very desirable, as far as it goes, that an emotion be "registered" fitly. But to aim at fitting expression alone is to aim at naturalness alone. And this is not enough, because there may be natural ugliness, and because even the beauty of nature is essentially different from the beauty of art.

Shakespeare's plays are not admired simply because they reveal human character truthfully. Rembrandt's paintings are not preserved in museums merely because

they are truthful representations of Dutchmen. The Venus of Milo would not have a room to herself in the Louvre if the statue were nothing more than a life-like figure of a woman partly dressed. In drama, poetry, fiction, painting, sculpture, and music, it has never been considered that appropriateness, naturalness, or truthfulness was in itself sufficient to distinguish the work as art. And it surely cannot be so in the movies.

It certainly has not been so in the earlier arts of motion. The dance as a form of expression is beautiful, but it is so far from natural that if the average voter started out to express his joy or grief, or love or defiance, the way a dancer does on the stage, he would be given a free ride to the psychopathic ward. The stage pantomime is charming, but if you behaved in the presence of your true love the way Pierrot and Columbine behave, he or she, as the case may be, would probably decide that you were too much of a clown ever to become a responsible parent. The circus, too, though not properly to be classed as a form of art, combines and presents a vast number of interesting motions which you never expect to see outside the big tent. Dancers, pantomime actors, circus masters and performers, all clearly strive to collect our money by showing us the kind of motions which nature herself does not show.

But do not become alarmed. We do not propose to establish a school of unnatural acting in the movies. Let the women and men and greyhounds and weeping willows and brooks be as natural as they can be, like themselves and not like each other. Natural, yes, providing they be not natural in an ugly way. If

a brook is running in one direction as naturally as it can, and a greyhound is running in the opposite direction as naturally as he can, the combination of their contrary movements may not be pleasing in a motion picture. Art is art, not because it reflects some actual bit of nature, but because it is endowed with some beauty made by man.

What other properties pictorial motion should have, besides correct representation of action has been partly told in Chapter III, where the demands of ease and economy of vision were made a condition concomitant with beauty. We may further apply the same tests which have been applied to fixed design. But, in order to get a firm grasp of our subject let us first reduce pictorial motions to their simplest forms.

The simplest motion of all is the moving spot, especially when it is entirely unrelated to a setting or background; that is, the kind of moving spot which the spectator may see without at the same time seeing any other thing, either fixed or moving. A familiar example in nature is the dark dot of a bird flying high above us in a cloudless sky. An example from the screen is the effect of a ball of fire shot from a Roman candle through darkness, as in the battle scenes of Griffith's "Birth of a Nation." But even so simple a moving thing as a spot has two properties which are very important to the composer of motions. The moving spot, like all other motions, has direction and velocity. The buzzard soaring slowly in large circles affects us in one way, while the hawk swooping downward sharply, or the crow flying in a straight line, or the bat fluttering crazily in the air, affects us in quite a different way.

When direction and velocity are controlled, even a single moving spot may describe beautiful motion. Witness an airplane maneuvering high in the sky, or a torch waved gracefully in the darkness. Beauty springs from control; ugliness follows lack of control. But control is no easy thing in the movies, for it is rare indeed that a director has only a single moving point to manage. Almost always, he has the problem of relative direction and relative speed. Moving things must be related to other moving things, and also to fixed things. Even if the picture consists only of a torch waved against a black background, we have the problem of relating that motion to the four fixed lines of the frame of the screen.

But can we expect a motion picture director to stop and think of so small a matter as a ball thrown from one hand to another, to ask himself whether such an action is beautifully related, in direction and velocity, to everything else in the picture, fixed or moving? Yes, we can expect him to do so until he becomes artist enough to think of these matters without stopping. He should think about pictorial composition until he can obey its laws without thought. Let him remember that even a flock of geese can compose themselves so appealingly in the sky and a herd of cows can wind so gracefully down a hillside that a tender girl and a tough hobo will gaze alike upon them in open-mouthed admiration.

The geese in the sky and the cows on the hillside are only a lot of moving spots, until they arrange, or compose, themselves. They may then illustrate the second type of moving object, that of the moving line. A line may, for example, move along its own

length in a way which pleases the eyes. Such motions we see in the slender waterfall, in the narrow stream, in such inanimate things as the long belting in a factory, or the glowing line of a shooting star, and in the files of geese, or cattle, or marching men.

A line may move in other directions besides that of its own length. It may swing stiffly from one end, as in the case of a pendulum or the rays from a searchlight. It may wave like a streamer in the breeze. It may move sidewise, as in the long lines of surf that roll up on the beach. It may move in countless other manners, as in the handling of canes, swords, spears, golf clubs, polo mallets, whips, etc. Now, of course, the director ordinarily thinks of a weapon as a weapon, and not as a moving line. He studies the characteristic action of an officer drawing his sword or of a Hottentot hurling his spear and tries to reproduce them faithfully so that no small boy in the audience may be able to pick out flaws. This is well, so far as it goes. A painter would study these characteristic actions, too, and would suggest them with equal faithfulness. But he would do something more. He would place every object so carefully in his picture that its line harmonized with the four lines of the frame and with all of the other lines, spots, and pictorial values in his work.

Now we are beginning to guess how pictorial motions must be composed; but first let us see what other kinds of motion there are. If we take another look at the geese in the sky we may find that they have composed themselves into the form of a "V" or a "Y" floating strangely beneath the clouds. This

illustrates the third type of motion, the moving pattern.

We distinguish between a moving pattern and a moving spot or line, because a pattern relates its separate elements to each other. This relation may or may not change as the pattern moves. Thus the V-shaped pattern formed by the flying geese may become sharper or flatter, or one side may be stretched out longer than the other, as the flight continues. All fixed pictures are patterns which do not change in form while we look at them, and the pictorial principles therein involved have been thoroughly discussed in the preceding chapters. But if the director wants a pattern to move to the right or left, up or down, away from him or toward him, or to change its character gradually, then a new problem of composition arises, and the solution of this new problem is both inviting and perplexing.

It is inviting because there are so many patterns which gain beauty from motion or change. A fixed circle is not so appealing to the eye, for example, as a rolling hoop. A wheel standing still is not so fascinating as one that rotates, like the wheel of a wind mill, or one that rolls, like the wheel of a carriage. Thus also the pattern formed by the rectangular shapes of a train standing still does not please the eye so much as the harmonious change in that same pattern when the train swings by us and winds away into the distance.

The patterns which may be compared with mathematical figures, such as circles, squares, triangles, diamond shapes, etc., are not the only ones. We are simply mentioning them first to make our analysis

clear. Every group of two or more visible things, and nearly every visible thing in itself, must of necessity be looked upon as a pattern, either pleasing or displeasing to the eye. Therefore every motion picture that has been, or can be, thrown upon the screen describes a pattern, fixed, moving, or changing. If the direction and rate of these motions and changes can be controlled, there is hope for beauty on the screen; if they cannot be controlled, there is no help but accident.

A peculiar type of visible motion is that which we have elsewhere called "moving texture." Examples in nature are the changing texture of falling snow, the stately coiling of clouds, and the majestic weaving of ice floes in a river. In the movies the effect of moving texture is produced whenever the elements of the subject are so many and so small that we view them rather as a surface than as a design or pattern. It may be seen, not only in subjects from nature, but also in such things as a mob of people or a closely packed herd of cattle viewed from a high position. Mr. Griffith has a good eye and taste for the composition of moving textures, and has furnished interesting examples in nearly all of his larger productions.

Now let us see how far we have gone. We have defined four different types of pictorial motion, namely, the moving spot, the moving line, the moving pattern, and the moving texture. They may appear singly or grouped. For example, in a picture of the old-fashioned water wheel we have a combination of the moving line of the stream with the moving pattern of the wheel. And in a picture of a small motor boat, seen from afar, speeding over a lake the

composition contains a moving spot, the changing pattern of the wake, and the changing texture of the water. If we add to this picture a long train on the bank, trailing a ribbon of smoke, an airplane in the sky, and a sailing yacht on the lake, we have a subject which is difficult indeed to analyze, and infinitely more difficult to compose into pictorial beauty. Yet those are the very kinds of motion which a motion picture director must compose in every scene that he "shoots."

But we have not yet completed our analysis of the nature of pictorial motion. It has still another property, which we shall call "changing tonal value." Changing tonal value depends upon changes in the amount and kind of light which falls upon the subject, and upon changes in the surface of the subject itself. For example, the shadow of a cloud passing over a landscape gives a slightly different hue to every grove or meadow, to every rock or road. To watch these values come and go is one of the delights of the nature lover.

Nature's supreme example of the beauty of changing values may be seen in a sunset playing with delicate splendor on sea and sky. And if this beauty defies the skill of painters it is because they have no means of representing the subtle changes which run through any particular hue as the moments pass by.

The beauty of a sunset may long, perhaps forever, elude the cinematograph, but this machine can produce tonal changes in black and white at the will of the operator by the familiar trick of "fading in" and "fading out." This camera trick is of great service for dramatic effects, such as the dissolving of one

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From *The Covered Wagon*. Distinctive rhythm of moving lines, interesting changes in pictorial pattern, and harmonious play of light and shade are skillfully used in this photoplay to intensify its dramatic meaning. See pages 9, 66 and 140.

picture into another; but it has a greater power, which has not always been appreciated and taken advantage of by directors, the power of producing for the eye a pictorial rhythm of tonal intensities. This effect is somewhat like the "crescendo" and "diminuendo" in music.

When we consider that changing tonal value may be combined with changing direction, as well as with changing velocity, of moving spots, moving lines, moving patterns, and moving textures, we realize more keenly the problems of the cinema composer. His medium is at once extremely complex, extremely flexible, and extremely delicate.

But we have not yet revealed all of the strange qualities of the motion picture. A unique power of the screen, which can never be utilized by any other graphic art, is that which gives motion to things that are themselves absolutely at rest and immovable. Even the pyramids of Egypt can be invested with apparent motion, so that their sharp lines flow constantly into new patterns. It can be done by simply moving the camera itself while the film is being exposed. The appeal of apparent motion in natural setting is familiar to any one who has ever gazed dreamily from the window of a railroad car or from the deck of a yacht sailing among islands. Apparent motion on the screen makes a similar appeal, which can be enhanced by changing distance and point of view and by artistic combination with real motions in the picture.

Still other fresh means of pleasing the eye may be found in the altering of natural motions, as by the retarding action of the slow-motion camera, which

can make a horse float in the air like a real Pegasus; or by the cinematographic acceleration of motion which can out-rival an Indian conjuror in making a tree rise, blossom, and bear fruit while you are watching.

Another peculiar type of pictorial motion, which has never before existed, and does not come into being until it is projected upon the screen, is the magic motion of the "animated cartoons." The camera-man sees no such marvelous motions. He faces only a stack of drawings. The artist who makes the drawings does not see the motions except in his own imagination. But the spectator in the theater is delighted to see the strangely bewitched men and beasts, birds and trees, rocks and streams, weapons and machines, all behaving in impossible ways that no maker of fairy tales ever dreamed of. Here is a new field of pictorial composition, with distant boundaries and fabulous wealth. Those who exploit it will be able to teach many a valuable lesson to the director who merely takes photographs of actors in motion.

Nearly all of these motions might be found in a single "shot," that is, in a single section of film. But when these sections of film are joined together to form the finished photoplay they produce still another kind of motion, a constant shifting from scene to scene. Whether this succession is to be a series of collisions or a harmonious flow, depends upon those who cut and join the films.

There is finally the total movement which is the product of all of these motions working together. A scientist can show you in his laboratory that when

a cord vibrates in one way it gives forth a particular note, and that when the same cord vibrates in another way it gives forth a different note. He can also show you that a single cord can vibrate in several different ways at the same time. The tones and overtones thus produced constitute the peculiar *timbre,* or quality, of a musical note. Thus, too, in a motion picture the *ensemble* of all the kinds, directions, and velocities of motion constitutes the particular cinematic quality of that particular picture play. Whether that resultant quality shall be like a symphony or like the cries of a mad-house, depends on the knowledge, the skill, and the inspiration of the cinema composer.

Having named the principal motions in a picture we come now to the question of how those motions should be composed. When a musical composer sits down before his piano he knows that he may strike single notes in succession, giving a simple melody, or several notes at the same moment, producing a chord, or he may play a melody with one hand and a different melody with the other, or he may play a melody with one hand and a succession of chords with the other, or he may use both hands in playing two successions of chords. Before he is through with his composition he will probably have done all of those things.

It is much the same with the cinema composer. Before he has finished even a single scene he will probably have produced all of the different types of motions in varying directions, with varying velocities, and varying intensities. How may he know whether his work is good or bad? What are the proofs of beauty in the composition of pictorial motion?

A practical proof is dramatic utility. The motions of a photoplay are in the service of the story. They should perform that work well, without waste of time and energy. An æsthetic proof is their power to stimulate our fancy and to sway our feeling. Pictorial motions should play for us, until by the illusion of art we can play with them. Another proof is reposefulness. For at the very moment when we are stimulated by art we desire to rest in satisfied contemplation. How pictorial motions may produce beauty on the screen by being at work, at play, and at rest will be told in the following chapters.

CHAPTER VII

PICTORIAL MOTIONS AT WORK

ALL the movement which you see on the screen may be enjoyed, we have said, as something which appears beautiful to your eye, regardless of its meaning to your mind. But if that movement, beautiful in itself, also carries to your mind some significance, if it serves the dramatic plot in some positive way, then the picture will be so much the richer. Acting, of course, is visible movement that delineates character and advances plot. It is pictorial motion at work. And acting, curiously enough, is not limited to people and animals. In a sense there may be acting also by things, by wagons or trees or brooks or waves or water-falls or fountains or flames or smoke or clouds or wind-blown garments. The motions of these things also constitute a kind of work in the service of the photoplay.

One might say that the artistic efficiency of a motion picture may be partly tested in the same way as the practical value of a machine. In either case motions are no good unless they help to perform some work. "Lost motions" are a waste, and resisting motions are a hindrance. The best mechanical combination of motions, then, is that which results in the most work with the least expenditure of energy.

Doubtless every one will agree with us that if, while

a picture is showing, any great work is necessary to "get the story across," that work should be done by the picture and not by the spectators. They want the story to be clear, and they want it to be impressive. In other words, they want beautiful and significant material presented with the fullest emphasis. Emphasis results when the attention of the spectator is caught and held by the primary interest in the picture, instead of the secondary interest. In paintings, or in "still" pictures, or in those parts of moving pictures which are held or remembered as fixed moments, a great number of devices may be used separately or together to control the attention of the spectator so that the main interest gets its full emphasis. Pictorial motions on the screen may also be so well organized that they will catch and control the spectator's attention, and will reveal the dynamic vitality of the pictorial content.

The simplest principle of accent by motion is so obvious that we are almost ashamed to name it. It is this, that if in the whole picture everything remains at rest except one thing which moves, that thing will attract our attention. Photoplays are full of mistakes which arise through the violation of this simple law. In many a scene our attention is drawn from the stalwart hero to a candle on the mantlepiece merely because its flame happens to flicker; or from the heroine's sweet face to a common bush merely because its leaves happen to quiver in the breeze; or from the villain's steady pistol to a dog's tail merely because the dog happens to wag it.

It is no excuse to say that such motions are natural, or that they give local color. For, though a moving

trifle may help to give the correct atmosphere, it may also at the same time rob the heroine of the attention which is rightly due her. For example, in "The Love Light," which was conceived and directed by Frances Marion, there is the kitchen of the little Italian home where Angela (Mary Pickford) sits down to muse for a while. She occupies the right side of the picture while at the left is the fire-place with a brisk fire. The fanciful playing of the flames and smoke of that fire catch our attention immediately. We guess that this fire-place is not important in the story, and we turn our glances upon the heroine, but we cannot keep them there because the fire is too interesting.

When the spectator's reason tries to make him do one thing and his natural inclination tempts him to do the opposite, there is confusion and waste of mental energy; and during that hesitation of mind the opportunity for being impressed by the main interest of the play passes by. That rule may sound like a commonplace, but it is not nearly so commonplace as the violation of it in the movies.

If the director must have a fire in the fire-place, and if Angela is more important than that fire, then, of course, her motions should be made more interesting than its motions. It should always be remembered that the strangest, least familiar of two motions will attract our attention away from the other. The fire is strange, while Angela is familiar. In the preceding scenes she has walked, run, romped, laughed, cried, talked, and made faces; she has, in short, performed so many different kinds of motions that there is almost nothing unexpected left for her to do in order to take our eyes away from the fire. She

merely sits for a long time unnoticed. Presently, however, after the fire has lost its novelty for us, she arises, grasps a frying pan, and, using it as a mirror, begins to primp. Then at last we look at her.

A more striking case of misplaced emphasis may be found in the photoplay "Sherlock Holmes," directed by Albert Parker. The part of the great detective was played by no less a person than John Barrymore, yet in the very scene where he makes his first appearance he is totally eclipsed by a calico cow. In this scene, represented by the "still" opposite this page, we see a beautifully patterned cow swinging into the idyllic setting of a side street in Cambridge, following a rhythmic path from the background with its dim towers of the university, past the honeysuckle-clad walls of "Ye Cheshire Cheese," and out into the shadows of a picturesque tree. This cow holds our attention by her photographic contrasts of black and white, and because she and her attendant are the only moving things within the whole scope of the camera. This inscrutable cow gets the spotlight while the great Sherlock is neglected where he reclines drowsily in the shade. Here was really the most pictorial scene of the whole photoplay, and the annoying thing was that the cow never again showed hoof or horn. Why was she ever let in? No suspicion of murder, theft, or other deviltry was ever cast upon her. She neither shielded nor shamed any one. She did not help to solve any problem. There was no further allusion to cattle, dairies, or cheese. There was not even a glass of milk in the rest of the play.

Perhaps the innocent cow was an accident. Perhaps the director did not know, or had forgotten,

A typical bad movie composition, from an old film. But the pictorial mistakes here illustrated may be seen in some of the most recent productions. Intelligent criticism by spectators would soon make such careless directing intolerable. See page 75.

From *Sherlock Holmes.* An example of wrong emphasis. The cow attracts attention by her strong marking, the central position, and because she is the only moving thing in the picture. But the cow should not have been dragged in at all, much less accented. See page 100.

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that the whitest patch in a picture attracts the eye, that an irregular shape, such as the marking of a Holstein cow, attracts more attention than the familiar patterning of walls, windows, tree trunks, etc., that a moving object in a scene where everything else is still attracts and holds attention, and that a humble cow emphasized by all these cinematographic means makes more of a hit than the most highly paid actor dozing in the shade.

But the strangeness or novelty of a motion may emphasize it, even though other motions going on at the same time are larger and stronger. In support of this statement the author offers a personal experience which came in the nature of a surprise when first seeing Niagara Falls. One would think that if a person who had never seen this sight were placed suddenly before it, he would gaze spellbound at the awful rush of water, and that no other motion could possibly distract him. But the author's attention was first attracted to something else which impressed him more deeply, something which moved silently, very slowly and very delicately. That strangely attractive thing was the cloud of spray that rose steadily from the bottom of the fall, floating gently upward past the brink and vanishing continually in the sky. Its peculiar appeal lay in its strangeness, not in its strength.

The reader can doubtless recall similar cases where strangeness exerted an overpowering appeal. At best that strangeness is much more than the satisfaction of curiosity. It is a type of beauty which comes as a relief from the common, familiar facts of every-day life. The combination of strangeness and beauty has

a powerful charm, and he is an ideal director who can emphasize dramatic significance with that charm.

Violence, at least, is not a virtue in the movies, as so many directors seem to believe. Indeed, slowness and slightness may sometimes be more impressive than speed and volume. This is often demonstrated on the stage of the spoken drama, when, for example, the leading lady who speaks slowly and in low tones holds our interest better than her attendants who chatter in high pitch. The beauty of her speech is emphasized by its contrast with the ugliness of the others. So in the photoplay there may be more power in a single slight lowering of the eyes or in the firm clenching of a fist than in a storm of waving arms and heaving chests.

What has just been said refers to motions in a fixed setting, which operate either against or in spite of, each other; but two or more motions in a picture may work as a team, and may thus control our attention better than if they were operating singly.

First we observe that if a single object is moving along in a continuous direction it will pull our attention along in that direction, may, indeed, send our attention on ahead of the object. Thus if an actor swings his hand dramatically in the direction of a door he may carry our glance beyond his hand to the door itself. This law of vision works so surely that it can always be depended upon by a magician, a highly specialized kind of actor, when he wishes to divert the attention of his audience from some part of the stage or of his own person where a trick is being prepared. It is not true, as is popularly supposed, that we are deceived because "the hand is

faster than the eye"; it is really because the eye is faster than the hand. In other words, our attention outstrips the moving object.

In the movies this law controls our attention to traveling persons, vehicles, and things. If horsemen are represented as riding away they should be photographed with their backs toward us and with the distance between us and them increasing. Then, since our eyes travel beyond the riders, we get a stronger impression that the men are really riding far away. On the other hand, if the horsemen are coming home, the direction of movement should naturally be toward us. This seems clear enough; yet directors frequently prevent us from feeling the dramatic intent and force of travel, by "shooting" the moving subject from various angles in succession. Even Mr. Griffith has been guilty of this sort of carelessness. In "The Idol Dancer," for example, we have a scene (a) in which a party of South Sea island villagers are paddling away in a large canoe; correctly enough they are moving away from the camera. The next scene (b) shows some one raising an alarm in the village by beating a drum, which, as we have been informed, can be heard twenty miles away. It is a call to the canoe party to return. The scene which is then flashed on (c) is a close-up of the canoe coming toward the camera. The men are paddling vigorously. We think, of course, that they have already heard the alarm and are now returning. But no! Presently they stop paddling and listen. They hear the drum. The next picture (d), a "long shot," shows the canoe being maneuvered around, and the succeeding pictures all show the men paddling toward the camera.

Now it is perfectly logical for us to infer that the canoe is already homeward bound, when we see it coming toward us in scene "c" immediately after the drum has sounded the alarm, and we can therefore only resent being caught in error and virtually told, two scenes later, "This time we won't fool you, now the canoe, as you see, is really turning about."

If one moving object can send our thoughts ahead to the goal of its travel, two or more objects moving toward the same point can send our thoughts there with greatly increased force. Thus a picture of two ships shown approaching each other on converging courses will surely make us think of that region of the sea where they are likely to come close aboard each other. If there is an enemy submarine at that point and if the two vessels are destroyers, the suspense and emphasis is complete.

A similar law of attention may be seen at work in cases where lines move along their length to a junction. Suppose we take as a setting a western landscape in which two swiftly flowing streams meet and form the figure of a "Y." Suppose now that we desire to place an Indian camp in this setting so carefully that it will attract attention as soon as the picture is flashed on the screen. We must place it at the junction of the two streams, because the eyes of the spectators will naturally be drawn to that point. Now suppose that a long white road crosses the main stream just below the place where the tributaries meet. The position would be emphasized more than ever because the road would virtually form two fixed lines leading toward the bridge; and fixed lines, as we saw

in Chapter IV, also have the power of directing our attention to the point where a crossing is made.

Then let us suppose that the Indians build a fire, from which the smoke rises in a tall, thin column. That would constitute another line of motion. But would it emphasize or weaken the center of interest? It would, as a matter of fact, still hold our attention on the camp because of the curious law that, no matter in what directions lines may move, it is the point which they have in common that attracts our attention. Thus if we assume a landscape where there is only a single stream, with a camp at the upper end, and with smoke rising from a fire, we would still have emphasis on the camp, in spite of the fact that the two lines of motion are directed away from it.

The same curious power over our attention may be exercised by moving spots. If we see, for example, two ships sailing away on diverging courses, we immediately suppose that the ships are sailing out of the same port, and, even though we cannot see any sign of that port, our minds will search for it. So also in those electric advertisements where lines of fire, sprayed from a central source, rise and curve over into the various letters of a word, the emphasis is rather on the point where the lines originate than on any single letter or on the word as a whole. Electric signs, by the way, are surprisingly often examples of what not to do with motion if one desires to catch the eye and to strike deep into the mind and emotions of the observer. The most common mistake, perhaps, is the sign consisting of a word in steady light surrounded by a flashing border in which a stream of fire flows continuously from dusk till dawn. Our

eyes chase madly around with this motion and have no chance to rest upon the word for which the advertiser is wasting his money.

But, to return to the question of how motions running away from each other can throw the spectator's attention to the point where they originate, we can think of no more perfect example in nature than the effect which is produced by throwing a pebble into a pool. Ripples form themselves immediately into expanding rings which seem to pursue each other steadily away from a common center. Yet, despite the outward motion of these rings our eyes constantly seek the point from which they so mysteriously arise. That this is true every reader has experienced for himself. Here then we have discovered a fascinating paradox of motion, namely, that a thing may sometimes be caught by running away from it. This ought to be good news to many a movie director.

But let us see what other means there are of emphasizing a theme or some other feature of significant beauty in a photoplay. One method is repetition. But what is the effect of repetition? Is it monotony or emphasis? Does it dull our senses or sharpen them? There can be no doubt that the steady repetition of the sea waves breaking on the beach, or of rain drops dripping on our roofs, or of leaves rustling in the forest, or of flames leaping in our fire-places can send us into the forgetfulness of sleep. But, on the other hand, the periodic repetition of a movement in a dance, or of a motif in music, or of a refrain in poetry can drive that movement, that motif, or that refrain so deeply into our souls that we never forget it. We refer, of course, to the higher forms of danc-

ing, music, and poetry; for in the lower forms, such as the dancing of savages, the grinding of hand organs, and the "sing-song" of uninspired recitations the too frequent repetition soon results in monotony.

In the movies of to-day there is, we are glad to observe, very little bad repetition except that of close-ups, and even they are now more and more eliminated by directors. But there is also very little good repetition in the cause of artistic emphasis. The tendency is rather a touch and run. Seventy settings are used where seventeen would give us a stronger sense of environment. We read more publicity "dope" about a woman who can do a hundred "stunts" in five reels than about one who can strike a single enthralling pose, and can return to it again and again until it becomes as unforgettable as a masterpiece of sculpture.

The photoplay needs repetition, especially because of the fact that any pictorial motion or moment must by its very nature vanish while we look. Hence, unless all other circumstances are especially favorable for emphasis, such a motion or moment may vanish from our minds as well as from the screen. To fix these fleeting values is a problem, but it can be solved without the danger of monotony if each repetition is provided with a variety of approach, or if each repetition is made under a variety of circumstances. This is the method in music. A particular series of notes is struck and serves for a theme; then the melody wanders off into a maze of harmony and returns to the theme, only to wander off again into a new harmony and to return from a new direction to the same theme. After a while this musical theme, thus repeated with a variety of approach, penetrates our souls and remains

imbedded there long after the performance has ceased. The same method is often employed to give emphasis to a particular movement or pose in æsthetic dancing.

To show how repetition with variety of approach may operate on the screen let us remake in imagination some scenes from Griffith's "Broken Blossoms," a photoplay which was adapted from Thomas Burke's short story "The Chink and the Child." The wistful heroine, called simply The Girl, played charmingly by Lillian Gish, is shown in the wretched hovel of her father, "Battling" Burrows, a prize-fighter. We see her against a background of fading and broken walls, a bare table, a couple of chairs, a cot, and a stove. If she sits down, stands up, lies down, or walks across the room, she moves, of course, through a changing pattern of motion against fixed lines. And she ends each movement in a different fixed design. Now let us suppose that the most pictorial of all these arrested moments is the one which is struck when she pauses before an old mirror to gaze sadly at her own pathetic image, and that during this moment we see, not only the best arrangement of lines, patterns, and tones, and the best phase of all her bodily movements, but also the most emotional expression of her tragic situation as the slave of her brutal father. Wouldn't it be a pity if this pictorial moment were to occur once only during the play? How much more impressive it would be if she paused often before this mirror, always striking the same dramatic note. Such a pause would be quite natural immediately after she enters the room or when she is about to go out, or during her weary shuffling between the stove and the table while serving supper, or after she has arisen from a spell

of crying on the cot and tries to shape her tear-stained face into a smile. In all of these cases there would be variety and yet emphasis, always the same tonal harmony between her blond hair and the faded wall, always the same resemblance between the lines of her ragged dress and those of the old furniture, always the same binding of her frail figure into the hard pattern of her surroundings, as though she were but a thing to be kicked about and broken,—all this shown again and again until the full dramatic force and beauty of the pictorial moment is impressed upon the spectator.

This kind of repetition can be done much more effectively and with less danger of monotony in the photoplay than in the stage play, because much of the action which intervenes between the repetitions can be eliminated and other scenes can be cut in without breaking the continuity of visible motion, while on the stage no bridging of time or shifting of scene is feasible without dropping the curtain.

One device which is unique on the screen is the repetition of the same "shot" by simply cutting into the film numerous prints from a single negative. A well-remembered case was the "Out-of-the-cradle endlessly-rocking" theme of Griffith's "Intolerance," a picture of a young woman rocking a cradle, which was repeated at frequent intervals throughout the story. The picture remained the same, but the context was ever new; and, if the repetition was not impressive to the spectators, the fault was not in the device itself, but rather in the fact that there really was no very clear connection between the cradle-rocking and intolerance.

Whenever we speak of emphasis in art we are naturally concerned about emphasizing that which is vital in the theme or story. We do not, for example, emphasize a man's suspenders in a portrait where the main theme is grief. Nor need we, for that matter, emphasize tears; for a man might show as much grief with his shoulders as with a wet handkerchief. In other words, if the theme is grief we should emphasize grief itself rather than any particular gesture of grief.

Similarly if in a romantic story the main theme is dashing sword play, it is swordsmanship which should be stressed, and not the sword itself, unless, of course, that sword happens to have some magic property. Therefore it is bad art in "The Mark of Zorro," a Douglas Fairbanks play, to repeat with every subtitle a conventional sketch of a sword. It is bad, not only because the hero's sword needs no emphasis, but because a mere decorative drawing of a sword cannot reinforce the significance of the real sword which the hero so gallantly wields.

There is a recurring note, however, in this play which can be commended. It is the "Z" shaped mark or wound which Zorro makes with his sword. We see it first as an old scar on the cheek of a man whom Zorro has reprimanded. Then we see Zorro himself trace the mark on a bulletin board from which he tears down a notice. Then we see him cut the dreaded "Z" upon the neck of an antagonist. And, finally, we see him, some days later, fix his weird mark squarely on the brow of his old enemy. And in every case except the first we observe the quick zigzag motion of the avenging sword.

Here the emphasis lies in the repetition of a pictorial element with some variety of shape and movement and under a variety of circumstances. The "mark" of Zorro becomes a sharp symbol which inscribes ever anew upon our minds the character of the hero, his dashing pursuit and lightning retribution.

Emphasis by repetition in the photoplay may further be achieved in ways which we shall not take the time to discuss. Thus an especially significant setting may be repeated in various lights and in combination with various actions; or some particular action, such as a dramatic dance, may be repeated in a variety of settings.

A sure means of emphasis is contrast. We have already shown how this principle works in cases where a moving thing is contrasted with other things which are at rest. Yet the contrast in such cases works only in one direction. That is to say, the contrast throws the attention on the motion, but it does not at the same time draw any attention to the fixed objects. It will be interesting now to illustrate a sort of double-acting contrast which may produce great emphasis in pictures. In the well-known case where a tall man stands beside a short one on a stage the difference between them is emphasized by the contrast in their statures; and when we meet them off the stage we are surprised to discover that one is not so tall, and the other not so short, as we had been led to believe. In a photograph, for a similar reason, if a very black tone is placed sharply along a very white one, each tone will make the other seem more intense. And if a painter desires to emphasize a color, say red, in his painting he does not need to do so by spreading more

paint over the first coat. Red may be accented by placing green beside it. In fact, each of these two colors can accent the other by contrast.

Similarly when two motions occur together the contrast between them may be double-acting. When you are setting your watch, for example, the minute-hand seems to run faster, and the hour-hand more slowly, than is actually true, because of the contrast in their rates of speed. This simple law might well be applied in the movies when emphasis of motion is required. We would thus get the effect of speed upon the mind without the annoyance of speed for the eye.

One does not have to be a critic to realize that there is entirely too much speed on the screen. Some of this dizzy swiftness is due to imperfect projection or to the worn-out condition of the film; witness the flicker and the "rain" of specks and lines. Much of it is due also to the fact that the projection is "speeded up" to a faster rate than that of the actual performance before the camera. But there is also a lamentable straining for effect by many directors who believe that an unnaturally fast tempo gives life and sparkle to the action. Perhaps some of these directors have not been able to forget a lesson learned during their stage experience. In the spoken drama it has long been a tradition that actors must speak more rapidly, and must pick up their cues more promptly, than people do in real life, in order that the play may not seem to drag. But we know that the motion picture is in danger of racing rather than dragging. And racing, as we have said, hurts the eyes.

The principle of contrast can relieve the eye of a part of its work without imposing any additional task

upon the mind. Thus some crazy Don Quixote may *seem* to cut and thrust with greater agility than the fighting which we actually *see*, provided his action is contrasted with the restful poking of his ham-fed servant, Sancho Panza. And thus a railroad train which really was running at a moderate speed, might *seem* to dash by on the screen, if it were contrasted with the ambling gait of a farmer's team driven in the same direction along the tracks.

A kind of emphasis which we may classify as contrast is that which occurs when movement is suddenly arrested. The unexpected stop not only makes the previous motion seem faster than it really was, but it also fixes attention more alertly on the thing which has just stopped moving. When you bump against a chair in the darkness you are always astonished to find that you were dashing along instead of merely walking slowly. But the shock has deceived you, for you really were walking slowly. If you are out hunting and your setter stops in his tracks, your eye is immediately upon him, and will remain so fixed until he or something else makes the next move. The same principle works on the screen. If an actor, or an animal, or a thing is in motion and then unexpectedly pauses, the effect of the pause is to attract immediate attention, as well as to make the previous motion seem to have been faster than it actually was. Sometimes this law may operate to distract our attention from the dramatic interest. If, for example, an outdoor scene has been "shot" on a squally day, and the wind has abruptly died down for a few moments during the climax of the scene, the effect on the screen will be to attract our attention instantly to the leaves

which have stopped fluttering, or the garments which have stopped flapping. We will observe the sudden change in the weather and forget the state of the story.

With this argument we ourselves shall pause, in order to summarize the principal ways in which pictorial motions, working singly or together, can produce the greatest impression on the spectator with the least expenditure of his mental energy. Here is the list: A thing in motion is normally more emphatic than anything at rest in the same picture. Of two motions the one which is the more surprising or fanciful gets the chief attention. Slowness or slightness may sometimes by contrast be more emphatic than great speed or volume. A moving spot or a line flowing along its own length has a tendency to carry attention along with, or even ahead of, itself in the direction of movement. Two or more movements along well-marked lines, whether converging or diverging, focus attention on the point which these lines have in common. Lines moving in circles away from a common center hold attention on that center. Repetition can work for emphasis without monotony, provided it be a repetition with variety of circumstances. Contrast between two simultaneous motions or between a motion and an abrupt rest may be double-acting, that is, may emphasize in both directions.

Our discussion of motions at work in a picture has not been exhaustive. The list might easily be made three times as long as it is. But it is long enough to illustrate the evil which motions may do if they are turned wild on the screen, and the good which they may work if they are harnessed by a director who

understands these fundamental principles of pictorial composition.

However, all work and no play would make any picture dull, but that is a subject for another chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

PICTORIAL MOTIONS AT PLAY

THE average matter-of-fact man thinks that artists concern themselves only with copying their subjects, and that their success as artists consists in copying correctly. He is satisfied with a painted portrait of his wife, provided it is a "speaking likeness," and he craves no other magic of design and color. Such a man praises a photoplay if it presents a "rattling good story," and expects no thrill from the cinema composer's conjuring with shifting patterns and evanescent tones. At least he would say something to that effect if you argued the matter with him. But he would be mistaken in his self-analysis, for even a prosaic person really enjoys the decorative rhythmical quality in a picture, though he may not be conscious of doing so. And every spectator can get the richest beauty from the screen only when the pictorial motions play as well as they work.

What is the difference between play and work? We know that when our work most resembles play it is most enjoyable. And we know, too, that play, even when it has not been professionalized, often comes very near being work. The playing of children, as that of grown-ups, is often very highly organized and pursued with a great deal of effort and earnestness. Play, however, may be characterized by spontaneity

and variety. It is not forced, like work, which aims for some definite practical result; and it does not have the rigidity and uniformity which in work sometimes develops into dullness. If the emphasizing of dramatic expression may be called the work of pictorial motions, then the spontaneity and variety which accompanies this work may be called the play of pictorial motions. And that play is essentially the same as rhythm.

We think immediately of two of the elder arts in which rhythm is all important—dancing and music. Music leads us to the thought of song, and poetry, and oratory, arts which also are dependent on rhythm. Dancing suggests sculpture, and sculpture suggests painting, arts which would have little beauty without the quality of rhythm. Even architecture must have it. From art we turn to nature, and we see the poignant beauty of rhythm in cloud and wave, in tree and flower, in brook and mountain, in bird and beast. The motion picture, which is the mirror of nature, and at the same time the tablet upon which all of the elder arts may write their laws, must bring to us the inheritance and reflection of rhythm.

This quality has already been discussed in connection with the laws of the eye, in Chapter III, and in connection with static composition, in Chapter V. We come now to the pictorial problem of weaving the individual and combined motions of a photoplay into a totality of rhythm. First, let us consider the case of a single moving spot. Suppose that we have before us a barren hillside of Mexico, an expanse of light gray on the screen. Down that hillside a horseman is to come, dark against the gray. If he rides in a

single straight line, directly toward the camera or obliquely down the hill, his movement will not be pleasing to the eye, nor will it seem natural. But if he moves in a waving line, a series of reverse curves freely made, the effect on the eye of the spectator will be somewhat like that of the "line of beauty" discussed in Chapter V.

An important difference, however, between a fixed line and one traced by a moving object is that the latter disappears as soon as it is drawn. It may linger in our memories, to be sure, yet our eyes can trace that line only once, and only in the direction taken by the moving object. That is, our physical eye cannot range back and forth over the vanished path, as it can over a fixed line. And a still greater difference is that the moving object has a rhythm of velocity as well as a rhythm of direction. Velocity and direction of movement arise and exist together, and consequently their relation to each other may produce a new rhythm. The horse, varying his pace according to the nature of the ground, may gallop along the level stretches, and may pick his way cautiously down the steep declines. There is natural harmony in rapid motion over a long smooth line, and slow motion over a short jagged one. A simple case like this may help us to answer the question, When is the relation between velocity and direction harmonious? But we have still the fundamental questions, When is a change of direction rhythmical? And, when is a change of velocity rhythmical?

We cannot promise to give direct and definite answers to these questions; but, recalling our discussion in Chapter V concerning rhythm in fixed design, let

us say that cinematic rhythm is a peculiar alternation of phases or properties of pictorial motion which gives the spectator a vivid sense of movement performed with ease and variety.

Now it may seem a vain task to analyze or try to define so delicate a thing as rhythm, because all of us can be carried away by rhythm without saddling it with a formula. Yet analysis will serve a useful purpose if it can help the director to avoid motions which are not rhythmical and if it can help the thoughtful spectator to fix the blame for the jumble of unrhythmical motions which he now so often sees on the screen.

Suppose we make a few tests upon the horseman coming down the hillside. If he moves in a perfectly straight line at a perfectly steady pace, the action will seem to be a forced, hard effort exerted without variety. No rhythm will be there. But if he moves, even without change of pace, along a path of flowing curves, we will sense a rhythm of direction, providing the horse seems to follow the winding path freely and without undue effort.

If, without change of direction, the horse frequently alters his gait from a gallop to a walk and back to a gallop again in equal periods of time, say half a minute each, it will be apparent that ease and variety are utterly absent from the movement. And even if the horse follows a winding path and changes gait at such regular intervals the rhythm in direction will be neutralized by the lack of rhythm in velocity. If, however, there is a progression of varying directions, varying gaits, and varying durations of time which appear to be spontaneously and easily performed, a

progression, moreover, in which both the similarities and the differences of the various phases can instantly be perceived by the spectator, he will immediately experience the emotion of rhythmical movement.

The above example illustrates how a single spot can move rhythmically over the area of a picture. A moving line, say a column of soldiers on the march, may have still more rhythm. We get a hint of this from the "still," facing page 133. It represents a scene from the Metro production of Ibanez's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," which was directed by Rex Ingram. We see there that the soldiers describe a path of alternate curves, instead of the straight lines and square corners which a less imaginative director would have ordered. Mr. Ingram has further heightened the rhythm by placing gaps here and there in the main column, and by introducing a secondary movement in the detachment which turns off from the road just before reaching the village. These movements are truly pictorial in composition; yet their meaning is none the less military and dramatic.

In the scene just described the various motions are similar, and the handling of them is therefore comparatively easy. But it is very difficult to make a rhythmical combination of motions which differ widely in character. In "The Dumb Girl of Portici," for instance, we are shown Pavlowa dancing on the beach, while the stately waves and pounding surf of the ocean fill most of the area of the screen. But there is no rhythm in the combined movements of that picture. The dancer without the sea, or the sea without the dancer, might have been perfectly rhythmical. But when we try to view them together in this photo-

play we get only the strong clash between their movements, and we feel no pleasure when shifting our gaze from one to the other.

Perhaps the picture might have been a success if the dancer's ground had been a bank sufficiently high to mask the severe effect of the surf, yet permitting a view of the incoming waves, and if the stately variety in the movement of the sea had been taken as a key to a sympathetic movement of the dancer. We might then get a harmonious, alternating flow of the two movements, our eyes might play easily from one to the other, and the total pictorial effect might arouse the emotion of rhythm.

In a similar way any of the movements of nature, such as the effect of wind on cloud, or tree, or field of grain; the fall or flow of water; the flight of bird or characteristic movement of beast, movements which, once admitted to the scene, cannot easily be controlled, might be taken as keys in which to play those movements which can be controlled.

Some practical-minded person may suggest that instead of worrying about the composition of "unnecessary" motions, it would be better to omit them. But such a person overlooks the natural human desire for richness in art. We are so constituted that we crave lively emotional activity. We love rich variety, and at the same time we enjoy our ease. When we listen to the music of a pianist we are not satisfied if he plays with only one finger, even though he might thus play the melody correctly, because the melody alone is not rich enough. We want that melody against all its background of music. We want those musical sounds so beautifully related to each other that their

harmony may arouse our feelings without unduly straining our attention.

A splendid example of secondary motion may be seen in the light draperies of a dancer. Even in the elementary movement of a few leaps across the stage we see the delicate rhythm of a scarf which is at first retarded by the air, then follows the dancer gracefully, and at last gently overtakes her.

Between the movements of body and scarf there is a charming play. They are pleasantly similar, yet they are pleasantly different. And there is a distinct feeling of progression in the various phases of this similarity and this difference. As spectators we catch this progression without any effort of the intellect and are instantly swept into its rhythm.

It would be easy for the director, of course, if the story which he is about to film always called for action as graceful as that of a dance. But unfortunately his scenario often demands the connecting of actions which, pictorially considered, are totally unrelated to each other. Yet if the director cares to seek the principles of beauty he will find many ways of harmonizing elements that are seemingly in conflict.

One way is simply to impose on each of the discordant elements a new value which they may assume in common without losing their own distinctive characters. Suppose, for instance, that we must show a society lady, with all her soft refinement, on a visit to a foundry, with all its sweating roughness. One may fear that there must be something repellent between her stately gentility and the bending backs of workmen; between her kid-gloved gestures and the flow of molten metal. Yet we can blend the whole

scene into a single rhythm by suffusing all its elements with the warm glow of the furnace and by playing over them all the same movement of quivering light and shadow. This vibrant, welding beauty which lady and laborer and machine may have in common, while still retaining their individual dramatic significance, will thus give the touch of art to a motion picture which might otherwise be merely a crude photographic record of an incident in a story.

Another way of bringing two conflicting motions into a rhythmical relation is to place between them a third motion which, by being somewhat like either of the other two, bridges the gap and thus transforms a sense of fixed opposition into a sense of moving variety. It would be somewhat of a shock, for instance, to shift our view instantly from the rippling flow of a narrow stream to the wheels and levers of a mill. But there would undoubtedly be a sense of continuity, and perhaps of rhythm, in shifting from a general view of the stream to a view of the water-wheel over which it flows, and thence to the wheels of the machinery inside the mill.

This method of interposing a harmonizer might be useful also in carrying over the rhythm of motion into the rhythm of fixed forms. Thus if we were to throw upon the screen a picture of the gently rolling sea, sharply followed by a view of the sweeping horizon of the hills, it is most probable that the two kinds of rhythm would not unite to draw a single emotional response from the spectator. He would feel only the contrast. But if the view of the sea were followed by a view of a field of grain, whose wind-driven billows resembled the waves of the sea and whose rolling

ground resembled the sweep of the hills, then the rhythm of the quiet hills themselves might easily seem to be one with the rhythm of the restless sea.

As we study the subject of visual rhythm we are led to compare it again and again with auditive rhythm, which is best exemplified in music. Thus it is easy to see how a given motion in a picture might be considered the melody while all the other motions serve as accompaniment, and how characteristic motions might be played against each other like counterpoint in music. It is easy to see how a whole succession of scenes might be considered a single rhythmical totality, like a "movement" in a musical composition. And it is certain that any director who thought of cinema composition in that sense would never permit the slovenly joining which is so familiar in photoplays. He would not then allow the shift from one scene to another to be essentially a clash of unrelated motions. He would assure himself rather that the characteristic types of motion in one scene, their directions, velocities, and patterns, played into corresponding factors of the next scene, until the entire succession became a symphony of motion.*

It is an interesting fact that movement in a photoplay may come from other things besides motions. One would get a sense of movement, for example, even if every scene in a photoplay were itself a fixed picture held for a few seconds on the screen. The various durations of these pictures might be in a rhythmical series. The same might be said of their dominant tones, and of their characteristic patterns

*For a further comparison between music and pictorial motions see Chapter IV of "The Art of Photoplay Making."

and textures. Would the time-lengths 3, 4, 2, 7, 5, be a good succession? Or would 3, 7, 4, 5, 2 be better? Which would make a better succession of figures? A circle, a triangle, and a cross? Or a cross, a square, and a circle? Questions like these are not trivial; neither are they over-refined. They and their answers should appear in the catechism of every cinema composer.

Speaking of durations of scenes reminds us that in music it is often the silences between the notes which vary in length while the notes themselves are uniform. This would be true in the case of a simple melody played on the piano. The intervals between notes can be observed by tapping out the "time" of the piece on a single key of the piano, or on a tin pan, for that matter; and the rhythm of time thus represented would alone enable a listener to identify any popular piece of music.

At present there are no rests on the screen, no blank periods between the scenes. There are, to be sure, moments of relaxation when scenes are being "faded out," and these "fades," like the dying away of musical sounds, have genuine rhythmical movement. But there is not on the screen any alternation between stimulus and non-stimulus, as there is in music, and as there is also in the performance of a stage play. The motion picture, therefore, lacks that source of rhythm which exists in musical rests or in the dramatic pauses of stage dialogue.

Whether intervals of non-stimulus could be successfully introduced on the screen can be learned only by experiment. Any director who is really in earnest about developing the motion picture as art should

make such an experiment. If he investigates the results of scientific tests in psychological laboratories he will learn that under certain conditions the normal spectator unconsciously creates rhythm in what he sees. It has been shown, for example, that a person looking at a small light which is flashed on and off at intervals has a tendency to make rhythmic groupings of those flashes, by overestimating or underestimating the lengths of the intervals. In other words, if you give the beholder's imagination a chance to function, it will indulge in rhythmic play. We believe that if a cinema composer could thus produce rhythm by illusion, as well as by actual presentation, his achievement would be epoch-making in the movies.

Movement, movement through rich variety, movement accomplished with the utmost ease—that is the essence of what we have chosen to call the play of pictorial motions. That play, as we have seen in the illustrations given, involves every kind of pictorial motion, whether of spot, or line, or pattern, or texture, or tone; and every property or phase, whether of direction, or rate, or duration; and every circumstance, whether in relation to other motions near or remote, simultaneous, or successive, or in relation to fixed elements of the picture. Any two or three of these things may be treated as a separate problem, but it is in the orchestration of all of them together that the director may achieve the dominant, distinctive rhythm of his photoplay. If he does not aspire to such achievement he is unworthy of his profession. If he evades his problems because they are difficult he is robbing his trust. If he declares that the world that loves movies does not crave beauty on the screen,

he is bearing false witness. If he believes that the beauty of a photoplay lies wholly in the emotional appeal of the performer and in the dramatic action of the plot, he is stone blind to art.

So far as the motions in a picture present the actions and reactions of the dramatic characters clearly and emphatically, they do faithful work; but this work becomes play when it is relieved of its hardness and dullness, and is animated with a spontaneity and variety that catches up the spectator into a swinging movement of attention. And those motions which are both work and play are basic in the beauty of cinematic art.

CHAPTER IX

PICTORIAL MOTIONS AT REST

THAT a moving thing may sometimes seem to be at rest is well known by any one who has ever spun a top. The top spins itself to sleep. We gaze upon it in a peculiar spell of restfulness, which is broken only when the top wakes up and begins to wabble.

Now one trouble with the movies is that they often wabble when they ought to spin. The motions in the picture too often lack a center of balance, a point of rest. All of us have been annoyed by excessive motions, jumbling, clashing, on the screen. But many of us have also, in lucky moments, been delighted by sudden harmonies on the screen, when the pictorial motions, without slowing up in the least, were conjured into a strange vital repose. And afterward, when we recalled the enthrallment of such moments, we became optimists about the future of cinema art.

Surely this is one of the characteristic appealing things about a motion picture, that it can show us motions doing the work of pictorial expression, indulging in rhythmic play, and yet suggesting a dynamic repose. Thus the youngest art can give us in a new way that "stimulation and repose" which, psychologists say, is the function of all arts. The painter who can suggest movement by means of fixed lines, masses, and colors is no more of a magician than the

cinema composer who can make moving things suggest rest.

Let me propose the following as working theories to explain the effect of reposefulness in organized pictorial motions: First, that the separate motions are balanced against each other; Second, that the significant motions are kept near to a center of rest within the frame of the picture, are sometimes even limited to an exceedingly small area of the screen; and, Third, that every significant motion is harmonized in kind, direction, and tempo with everything else in the picture.

The balancing of pictorial motions does not imply that they must be paired off in exact equals. Certainly we do not insist that a dramatic scene be so composed that when, for example, a person rises from a chair in one part of a room, some other person sits down in a chair in the opposite part of the room. Such an effect would be highly mechanical, like the teetering of a see-saw; and it is not possible for a spectator to get a thrill of beauty while his attention is being held down to mechanics. We mean rather to apply the same reasoning to pictorial motions which we have in Chapter V applied to fixed lines, shapes, and tones. In short, we want to see the values of pictorial motions so well distributed over the screen, and so related to each other, that they give the impression of being in perfect equilibrium.

Suppose we imagine a cinema scene which contains a waterfall in the left half, and nothing in the right half except a dark, uninteresting side of a cliff. That composition would be out of balance. And if a band of Indians entered the scene from the left and did a

war dance directly in front of the waterfall, that would throw the composition still more out of balance. Or if, at the opening of the scene, the Indians appeared dancing in front of the bare cliff, and then gradually moved over to a place in front of the waterfall, this cluttering of motions would certainly unbalance the picture.

Such cluttering is common on the screen because of the many movie directors who either are afraid of simplicity, or lack the skill which is necessary to make complexity appear simple. In the scene just mentioned the safest course would be to leave out the waterfall, however much of a natural wonder it may be, and to let the bare cliff serve as the entire background for the Indian dance. But if this cannot be done because of the peculiar demands of the plot, then the picture might be balanced by introducing some additional motion in the right half, say a column of smoke rising from a camp fire. Thus even the careful addition of a new element would tend to bring unity and restfulness into the arrangement of parts. Just visualize that composition, the whitish water falling on one side, and the light gray smoke rising on the other, and you will feel a peculiar restful balance which could never be obtained by a mechanical pairing of two waterfalls or two columns of smoke.

As critics searching for beauty on the screen, we might even carry our demand for pictorial balance still farther. In some other picture we might demand that there be motions in the upper part of the composition to balance those in the lower part. To be sure, we would hardly look for such balance in a stage play, or in an ordinary cinema scene where the

camera "shoots" in a level line, because in ordinary every-day life we see more motion near the bottom of our view than anywhere in the upper levels. Besides it is natural that weights should be kept low; any object is more likely to be in equilibrium when its center of gravity is low. But when we are shown a motion picture which has been made with the camera pointing downward, so that a level thing, like a plain or the surface of the sea, appears standing on end, then we like to see the points of interest so distributed that the various parts of the screen seem to be proportionally filled. Thus in a motion picture of a lake taken from a high cliff we are not pleased to see moving objects, boats, swans, etc., only in that area of the picture which comes near the lower edge of the frame. We realize instantly that the objects are not actually above or below each other in the air. And we forget, therefore, that the screen is really in a vertical plane and think of it rather as we would of a map lying before us. In fact, if there are swans in the near part of the lake view, then the distant surface of the lake will not appear to sink back into its proper level unless it bears some balancing weight and value, say, two or three small boats under sail.

However, even the best of balancing in a separate scene cannot insure a balance between that scene and the next one. Directors are often tempted to make shots from odd angles, straight up or straight down, and to scatter them through a film, showing, for example, a skyscraper lying down, or a city street standing on end. But the resulting series of scenes does not make a composition pleasing to the eye. It gives the effect of wabbling. Even if these oblique views show no

moving things whatsoever, their combined effect is the opposite of restfulness.

Returning now to the subject of balance in separate scenes, we may consider depth, the third dimension of a cinema subject. This dimension is usually far greater than either the height or the breadth of that space which the camera measures off for us. And it is interesting to see what problems the cinema composer has in relating motions in the third dimension to those in the other dimensions of the picture. He often finds it hard, for instance, to compensate in the background for the movements in the foreground, without destroying the dramatic emphasis. The usual trouble in the movies is that, when the dramatic interest is in the foreground, the motions in the background nevertheless draw so much of our attention to that region that the picture becomes too heavy in the rear; while, on the other hand, if the dramatic interest is in the background, the motions in the foreground nevertheless become so heavy that the front of the picture falls into our faces.

These are common faults; yet they may be avoided by foresight and ingenuity. In the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," Rex Ingram reveals a sure sense of proportion in his control of the marching soldiers. If you turn to the "still" of a village scene from this photoplay, facing page 133, you will get a suggestion of the equilibrium which is obtained for a time, at least, between the motions in various regions of the picture.

Let us say that the foreground of that scene extends from the camera to the cavalryman, that the middle ground is that area which is occupied by the build-

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From *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.* The arrangement in this scene has interesting balance between the right and left halves of the picture, as well as between the foreground and the background, and there is a vigorous rhythm in the moving columns of soldiers. See pages 120 and 132.

ings, and that the background is all the region which lies beyond the ruined tower. This picture has many distances, and yet they fuse together into a single composition. Equilibrium is maintained by the fact that the scattering figures near the fountain weigh against the marching soldiers to the left in the foreground, while the two sides find a center of balance in the quiet horseman and the three persons to whom he is talking. In the middle ground the same care has been shown, for the soldiers first swing to their left, past the tower, and then execute a balancing movement to their right. In the background there is a balance between those forces which are executing a "column right" and those which are proceeding down into the village street. And if we take the background of the picture as against the foreground, we shall find a balancing point in the narrowest part of the street. No undue attention is attracted to either side of this point, but the whole sweep of interest from front to back, or from back to front, is continuous and even. There is plenty of military movement here amid evidences of terrific bombardment, and yet, because of the artistic composition of the picture, we get from it all a momentary sense of repose, as though war itself were at rest.

Several details in this "still" are worth noting. For example, the comparatively few figures in the right side of the foreground are given additional weight by the whiteness of costume, as against the gray of the soldiers. Another interesting thing is the balance between the line described by the leading company of soldiers and the line of tree tops on the wooded hill, which begins near the upper right hand corner and

extends to the castle. This relation can be clearly seen by holding the "still" upside down.

The reader must keep in mind, of course, that in a "still" the arrested motion has not the same weight as the actual motion on the screen, and consequently the fixed things get more than their share of weight. Therefore in this "still" from "The Four Horsemen" the jagged holes in the buildings attract more attention than they do on the screen, where the movement of the soldiers and civilians brings the whole composition into balance.

When the whole picture is deep, as in the example just discussed, it offends us if some of the moving objects come near the camera, because this produces two pictures within a single frame, namely, a close-up and a long shot. The effect is as bad as that of listening to an orchestra so placed that some of the instruments are five feet away from our ears while the others are seventy-five feet away. In either case there comes a sense of violence instead of restfulness. The close-up superposed on the long shot is a common fault in photoplays. But we are often annoyed by the opposite fault also, that of jumbling two sets of actions which are going on in adjoining areas, one just beyond the other. In such a case the director should contrive to make the vertical planes seem farther apart than they really are; and it can easily be done without cleaving the picture in two.

To prove this let us imagine a cabaret scene containing prominent persons of the play sitting at tables near the camera, and a number of couples dancing on a floor farther away. In such an arrangement it is probable that the diners have more dramatic value

than the dancers; yet the dancing figures are likely to distract attention from those seated at the tables, and thus throw the picture out of balance. Mr. Ingram in "The Four Horsemen" had this very problem, and he solved it in a very simple and convincing way. He allowed a thick haze of cigarette smoke to envelop the dancers till they seemed dim and distant. Or, rather, he used the smoke as a transparent curtain which separates the diners from the action in the background. Thus balance was restored and the spectator could follow the action in the foreground without a sense of disturbance.

A separation of planes somewhat similar to this was skilfully effected by Allan Dwan in "Sahara." One of the settings is a luxurious tent in the desert. The front of this tent had a wide opening over which hung a veil of mosquito netting. Viewed from within the tent, this veil became a soft background against which the figures moved, while at the same time it served as a thick atmosphere to give dimness and distance to the figures which were just outside the tent. By this device, which is as natural and unobtrusive as the smoke screen described above, Mr. Dwan, besides providing a peculiar pictorial quality of gradated tones, kept two sets of figures separate and yet combined them in rich restfulness.

When a director is composing a scene in which there is a single moving element with a very short path of motion and no strong fixed interests to counter-balance it, he should remember that an object tends to shift the weight of interest somewhat in advance of its own movement. Therefore, a picture will seem to be in better balance if a movement begins near one

edge and ends near the center, than if it begins at the center of the picture and passes out at one side.

This observation regarding the shifting of balance during pictorial action raises the question whether it is a practical possibility to keep the composition of a cinema scene steadily in equilibrum for minute after minute. Since the fixed accents do not change their positions and the moving accents do, one might suppose that the scene must sooner or later fall out of balance. But this is not necessarily so. It is true that if, for example, there is a group of fixed accents in the left half of the picture, and a single figure starts from the center and passes out of the scene at the right, it would tend, first, to over-balance the right side of the picture, and then suddenly to leave it without weight. But this tendency may be counter-acted by swinging the camera slightly to the left without stopping the exposure. Such an expedient would shift all of the fixed accents together, though at the cost of introducing a momentary false motion. The ingenious director may find other means by which to compensate for the changes which must of necessity come about in a cinematic composition. However, when it is not possible to have good proportion and balance at more than one moment of a changing scene, that moment should be at the pictorial climax, the crucial point of that scene, the instant when the spectator is to receive the strongest impression, the greatest stimulation and yet the most perfect repose.

Equilibrium is reposeful because it is characteristic of a thing at rest. To say that another characteristic of a thing at rest is that it stays where it is, may sound like an Irish bull; but we say it, nevertheless, in order

to make another point in our argument that pictorial motions may sometimes be in dynamic repose. It is quite possible for a pictorial motion to give a sharp impression of power, weight, and velocity, and yet stay practically where it first appears on the screen. An express train, for example, may be shown in a "long shot" starting several hundred yards away from the camera and continuing for miles into the distance, and yet the actual moving image on the screen might cover an area less than two feet square, and might, from beginning to end of the scene, never come near the frame of the picture. Thus the train, without losing any of its impressive character, would provide a reposeful motion for the eye to gaze upon. Surely such an effect would be better than to show the train as a close-up on a track at right angles to our line of sight, with the locomotive crashing in through the frame at the left of the picture and crashing out through the frame at the right.

The reposeful quality of restricted movement on the screen is due partly to the fact that the flicker and the eye movement is thus reduced, as we have said in Chapter III. In the case just described it is due also to the contrast between the slight movement which we actually *look at* and the large movement which we really *perceive and feel.* We look at inches and perceive miles. Thus we see very much with extreme ease.

We have remarked in preceding chapters that every picture has four lines, those of the frame, which the composer must always consider. He could, it is true, soften the sharp boundaries of the picture by using some masking device with the camera, but this is

usually done. The four corners of the frame are always strongly emphasized, because of the crossing of lines at right angles. To lead another strong line into one of the corners would surely result in undue emphasis and lack of balance, because of the power of converging lines. It is almost as bad to lead a strong line squarely into the frame between the corners, because such a meeting creates two more right angles to attract attention. Of course, there may be certain lines in a composition, such as the line of the horizon, which cannot stop short of the frame. In such a case it is well to have some other strong accent not far from the center of the picture in order to keep the attention of the beholder within the frame.

What is true of the relation between fixed lines is also true of the relation between paths of motion and fixed lines. It is rather annoying to watch a continuous movement continually being cut off by the frame; and it is especially annoying when one sees that such a composition might have been avoided. In a waterfall, for example, the points of greatest interest are the curving top and the foaming bottom, and we like to see both at the same time and wholly within the frame. A motion shown entirely surrounded by things at rest is reposeful on the screen as well as in nature. Like a fixed object it stays where it is.

There are certain pictorial motions, however, such as the falling of snow, which must always either begin or continue outside of the frame. But even when we view such a motion on the screen or in nature we get a feeling of repose, because our eyes do not perform any following movement; we do not, in watching a snow storm through a window, pick out cer-

tain flakes and follow them from a height until they strike the ground; but rather we keep our line of sight steady upon a certain spot while the changing texture slips by. One can get the same effect by looking down from a tall building into a crowded street. The individuals are no longer thought of as separate moving objects, because they weave themselves into a broad band of moving and changing texture. Here we get the feeling of restfulness, of motion in repose, in contrast to the feeling of restless motion when we ourselves become part of that crowd.

A delightful picture in "Barbary Sheep," directed by Maurice Tourneur, is the view of a flock of sheep moving slowly along from left to right. The animals are so crowded together that the mass as a whole has a textural quality. And yet it is not fixed texture, like that of cloth, because some of the sheep move faster and then again more slowly than the others, and thus, as in the case of the snow flakes, or the crowd in the street, give us a vital stimulus of change within the texture itself.

A somewhat similar sense of rest comes from watching those motions which arise and vanish within some given area of the screen. A cloud of cigarette smoke which floats and coils for a few moments and then fades into nothing, bubbles which rise in a pool and break into faint ripples that finally die on the glassy surface, the blazing and dimming of tones through the photographic device of the "fade-out" and the "fade-in"—all changes of this type we sense vividly as movements, and yet as movements in delightful repose.

At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned the

spinning top as an example of motion that had the appearance of being at rest. To a certain extent all circular movement presents that appearance and may be very pleasing on the screen, providing it does not conflict with our desire for fitness and is not allowed to become monotonous. A fly wheel whirling may look like a disk at rest, but it is monotonous and entirely without artistic stimulation. The action within the ring of a circus presents a more stimulating show, and yet it is not quite satisfying as an artistic composition of motion, because we cannot help feeling that it is not natural, that it is unfit for a horse to turn forever within a forty-foot ring. In the æsthetic dance, on the other hand, a circling movement can always be of satisfying beauty, full of graceful vitality and yet delightfully reposeful, too, because it never flies away from its axis fixed within our area of vision.

Now, we cannot recommend that the players of a film story should always be shown running around in circles. And yet their separate actions, gestures and bodily movements in general, may often be so composed that they progress in a circular path, each movement tracing an arc of a circle which nowhere touches the frame of the picture. Such circularity of motions would give unity, balance, and repose. A good example of circularity may be seen in "The Covered Wagon" when the wagon train, just before coming to a halt, divides and swings into two large arcs of a circle, which slowly contract as the wagons turn inward toward a common center.

Another interesting example of circular balance may be seen in "One Arabian Night," a German pho-

toplay directed by Ernst Lubitsch. The scene is a court yard, viewed from on high. Looking down we see eight or ten servants running inward from all sides to a focal place, where they pile up cushions for the hero and heroine. Then they turn and run outwards to get more cushions. In a few moments they return, and finally they seat themselves in a circle about the central figures. Here is a charming combination of pictorial motion with a natural dramatic by-play, delighting the eye and lingering long as a pleasant motor image in memory. When we analyze this part of the picture we discover that the principle of balancing motions has been applied perfectly. To begin with, the design is kept in balance because the men enter at the same time from opposite directions and approach the center at equal speed. Thus, while they are separate figures moving over symmetrically arranged courses, they also form a circle which gradually contracts about a fixed center. This inward movement of the men is itself balanced by the corresponding outward movement when they go to get more cushions, which is in turn balanced when they come back. Finally this pattern of a circle contracting, expanding, and contracting again, harmonizes perfectly with the fixed circle which is formed when the men seat themselves. There is a further pleasing continuity in the composition when a woman enters the scene and dances over a circular path just within the ring formed by the servants.

To the so-called practical business man, whose artistic experience consists chiefly in drawing dollar signs, it may sound like sheer folly for us spectators to ask a director to spend valuable time in refining the art

of pictorial motions by some of the methods above suggested. The money magnate may not realize that even a slight improvement, a delicate touch, may be as important in a picture as in the motor of his touring car. Yet he does know, of course, that in the world of industry the superiority of one article over another may lie in a secret known only to the maker, a secret perhaps never even suspected by the man who sells the article. We should be sorry indeed to lose credit with the man who can draw dollar signs, because we need his co-operation, and we hope, therefore, that he will not long remain blind to the fact that in art the superiority of one article over another may lie in a concealed design so skilfully wrought that neither the spectator nor the man who traffics in the spectator's pleasure may suspect its presence.

Balanced motions and motions that are limited in area are valuable on the screen, we have said, because they can stimulate the spectator while giving him the satisfaction of repose. We come now to a third characteristic of motions that appear to be at rest, the fact that they are in perfect adjustment with everything else around them. Perfect adjustment means that all of the moving elements of a pictorial composition are at peace with the fixed elements, as well as with each other. It means harmony, the supreme quality of every art.

No other art, not even music, contains so great a number of varied parts as the motion picture. To fuse all of these parts into a single harmonious whole requires knowledge and skill and happy inspiration, yet fusion must take place in the cinema composition itself in order that the spectator may be spared the

annoyance of trying to unify in his own mind the ill-adjusted factors on the screen.

The pleasing effect of motions in harmony can be illustrated by something with which we are all familiar from childhood, the display of sky rockets. The spray of stars, flaming up, burning bright lines in the sky, and fading out again into the darkness of night, exhibits a perfect harmony of kinds, directions, and rates of motions, as well as of changes in brightness. We have explained in Chapter III that things moving in similar directions are more pleasing than those crossing in opposite directions because they are easier for the eye to follow. And it is, of course, true that whatever hurts the eyes will probably not seem beautiful. But a picture must please our emotions as well as our eyes. We must feel that it is good, that it is in order, that it obeys some law of harmony. In the case of the sky rocket we do feel that there is unity and not discord, rest and not warfare. Though we may not stop to analyze the matter, we feel that at any one moment all of the burning elements are in perfect agreement, obeying the same law of motion.

Now let us recall some familiar movie subjects, and test them for harmony. A common picture is that of a horse and an automobile racing side by side. Here there is similarity of direction, but there is no similarity of motion. The car glides; the horse bounds. The changing pattern which the horse describes with legs and neck and back and tail finds no parallel in the moving panel of the car. Besides, we feel that there is antagonism between the two. They hate each other. Their histories and destinies are different. They are not in harmony. A much better

subject is a huntsman galloping over the countryside with a dog at the horse's heels. Every action of the one animal is somewhat like every corresponding action of the other animal. One might even say that the horse is a large kind of dog, while the dog is a small kind of horse. And, as they cross the fields in loyalty to the same master, their motions harmonize.

There would be unity of a similar kind in a picture of an automobile and a railroad train racing on parallel roads. Although they are two separate machines, their motions fuse into one thing, which we call a race. If the roads are not perfectly parallel but swing slowly away from and toward each other again, we get a pleasing rhythm of motions, yet, because the directions and speeds are similar, the unity still remains.

But if we imagine the train dashing by a farmstead where a Dutch windmill sweeps its large arms slowly around, we would feel again a lack of unity between the two kinds of motions. The impression upon our minds would be confused; it would not be a single impression, because the moving objects show two different kinds of patterns, with rates of speed that are not sufficiently alike to be grasped as a unity. A better picture would be that of an old Dutch mill on the bank of a river whose sluggish waters flow wearily by. Perhaps even an old steamboat with a large paddle wheel might be so introduced that the revolutions and patterns of the two wheels would be similar, while the forward thrusts of the boat and the current would also be similar, all four movements blending together into a single harmony, like the music of four different instruments in an orchestra.

The orchestration of motions is, in fact, the proper work of the cinema composer. If he cannot control the objects which move before him, he is in as bad a way as the director of an orchestra who cannot make the musicians do his bidding. We can sympathize with the movie director, because some of the things he wants to bring into a picture are not so easily controlled as musicians. One can talk to a fiddler, but one cannot waste time talking to a brook or to a Dutch windmill. However, if a windmill will not behave itself, it can be dismissed no less promptly than a fiddler.

The average photoplay seen in the theaters to-day could undoubtedly be improved by retaking it with at least half of the material omitted from every scene. The simplicity thus obtained would help to give a more unified effect, would be less of a strain on the eyes, and would require less effort of the mind. But simplicity is worshiped by only a few of our best directors. The average director who is asked to film a scene of a country girl in a barnyard, a scene in which simplicity itself should predominate, will produce a conglomeration of chickens fluttering, ducks waddling, calves frisking, a dog trotting back and forth, wagging his tail and snapping his jaws, gooseberry bushes shaking in the wind (always the wind), a brook rippling over pebbles, and, somewhere in the center of the excitement, the girl herself, scattering corn from her basket while her skirts flap fiercely about her knees. From such a picture the spectator goes out into the comparative quiet of crowded Broadway with a sigh of relief, thankful that he does not have to live amid the nerve-wracking scenes of a farm.

When we insist that the motions in a picture should be in harmony with each other because of the pictorial restfulness which thus results, we do not forget that motions should also be in harmony with the meaning, the dramatic action, which the scene contains. Some red-blooded reader of this book might possibly have the notion that artistic composition of a picture will rob it of its strength. Please may we ask such a person to read carefully Chapters II, IV, and VII of this book? We have maintained there that good pictorial composition can make any movie "punch" harder than ever. Let us illustrate that argument again. Suppose we "shoot" two brawny men in a fist fight. The motions of the men should have unity, even though their souls might lack it. It sounds like a contradiction, but the methods of the men fighting should harmonize in motion. If they do not, we cannot enjoy the fight. What would you think of a fist fight in which one man had the motions of a windmill, and the other had the motions of a chicken?

Many movie directors have had stage experience, either as actors or directors, and are instinctively able to harmonize the dramatic pantomime of actors or actresses, whenever this pantomime takes place in the midst of perfectly quiet surroundings, as is usual in the setting of the theater stage. But as soon as these directors take their troupe out "on location" they encounter difficulties, because the wind nearly always blows costumes, bushes and trees into motion, because there are nearly always animals or moving vehicles on the scene, and because the "location" is more likely than not to include such things as fountains, waterfalls, or sea beaches. They find therefore, that the

movement of the actors during any one moment of the picture is likely to be discounted by the gamboling of a lamb or the breaking of a sea wave during the next minute.

The sea and surf possess a perfectly rhythmical motion which one may watch for hours without becoming weary. And the effect of that motion may well be heightened by composing it with other moving objects so that the various motions taken together will harmonize in directions, shapes, and velocities. Such composition was very well done in the climactic scenes of "The Love Light," the Mary Pickford play directed by Frances Marion, who also wrote the story. Views of the sea breaking on the shore are shown time and again throughout the play, but the most impressive scenes are near the end where a sailing party lose control of their sloop in a storm and are shipwrecked on the shoals. Here the principal moving objects partake of the movements of the sea and therefore harmonize with it in tempo. The vessel rises and falls with the waves. The people above and below decks sway and lurch with the same motion. The water which breaks through the hatches and trickles down the companionway describes the same shapes and flows with the same rate as the water which breaks over and trickles down the rocks. The total effect is a single impression of motion in which the separate parts parallel and reinforce each other. And this total impression is sustained through many scenes, even though the position of the camera is often shifted and the subject is viewed from many angles. This cinematic climax is a good example for readers to keep in mind when they set out through the movie theaters

in search of cases where the motion of nature has been successfully harmonized with those of other motions demanded by the action of the story.

One of the ugliest of pictorial conflicts occurs when false motion and real motion are projected together upon the screen. Who has not been annoyed by the typical "follow" picture in which a lady is shown ascending a flight of stairs, while the stairs themselves (because the camera has been swept upward during the exposure) flow swiftly downward across the screen? The "follow" or "panoram" picture of moving things is usually bad because it falsifies real motion and gives the appearance of ugly motion to things which actually are at rest. An atrocious picture of a horse race, exhibited not very long ago, had been taken by carrying the camera on a motor car which had been kept abreast though not steadily abreast, of the horses. The result was that the grand stand, guard rails, and all fixed objects flew crazily from left to right, and that, because of the irregular swinging of the camera, the horses sometimes seemed to drop back together, even though they had clearly not slackened their speed.

We have been discussing in the above paragraphs the harmony of pictorial motions which occur together at a given moment. They may have a harmony like that of musical notes struck in a chord. But pictorial motions come in a procession as well as abreast, and these successive motions may have a harmony like that which runs through a melody in music.

In a stage play it is not difficult to organize simultaneous or successive actions so that the total action will produce a single effect, because all the movements

of human performers are naturally very much of the same style. The gestures and postures of a performer in any given action are very likely to be followed by similar gestures and postures at frequent intervals during the play. Stage directors have developed their traditions of unity and harmony through centuries of theatrical history. They have learned to preserve, not only the "key" of the action, but the "tempo" as well. If they strike a certain pace at the beginning of the act or play they will maintain that pace with practically no variation to the end.

It would be most desirable if unity of motion could be sustained throughout the entire length of a photoplay, as in a stage play or in a musical composition. There should be a real continuity of pictures, as there is supposed to be "continuity" of actions described in a scenario. But such continuity is hard to find on the screen. In "The Love Light," for instance, the film which we have just discussed, there is little unity of motion except in the climactic scenes. The very action from which the title "The Love Light" is derived, is botched in composition. The light is that of a lighthouse and the heroine manipulates it so as to throw a signal to her lover. This action is shown in a series of cut-backs from a close-up of a girl in the lighthouse to a general view of the sea below and to a close-up of the hero. But the lantern with its apparatus of prisms makes a cylindrical pattern which does not harmonize in shape with the long white pencil of the searchlight sweeping the sea. Nor does it harmonize in motion, for the simple reason that the sweeping ray moves clock-wise, in spite of the fact that the girl rotates the lantern counter-clock-wise.

Two other discrepancies in these scenes may be noted. One is that in the close-ups the lantern does not appear to be lighted, and the other is that lighthouses do not, as a rule, send out light in pencil-like shape.

The scene above cited lacks pictorial unity, in spite of the fact that the neighboring scenes are in perfect unity of dramatic meaning. This illustrates the dangerous difference between saying things in words and saying them in pictures. If we write, for example, "she swings the lantern around slowly, etc.," no reader is likely to question whether the lantern is lighted or not, or whether it is rotated in one direction or the opposite. But the camera impolitely tells the whole truth. And some truths are full of fight when they are brought face to face with each other.

The suddenness with which one scene leaps to the next on the screen is a factor which many directors and most scenario writers fail to reckon with. In Chapter III we have discussed at some length the effect which these sudden jumps have upon our eyes. It remains now to see how the "flash" from one scene to another affects our minds. In "Barbary Sheep," directed by Maurice Tourneur, there is bad joining which may be illustrated by naming a succession of three scenes. They are: (1) A picture of a mountain sheep some distance away on the edge of a cliff, sharp against the sky, an excellent target for a hunter. (2) The hero out hunting. He sees something, aims his gun obliquely upward. Our eyes follow the line of the gun toward the upper left-hand corner of the frame. (3) Some society ladies in a room.

Perhaps the reader can guess, even from this incom-

plete description in words, how sudden and complete was the shock of scene 3 coming after the preparation of scene 2. There was a complete violation of unity of meanings, as well as of motions. We cannot say who was to blame for this bad art, whether it was the director, or some one in the "cutting room." Possibly some motion picture operator had mutilated the film in the theater. The fact remains that this part of the picture as it reached the audience was badly composed. The promise of one scene was not only ignored but ridiculed in the next scene.

An excellent illustration of how the promise made by a scene can be beautifully fulfilled for the eye by a following scene may be found in Griffith's "The Idol Dancer." Incidentally the joining shows how false motion may be harmonized with real motion. Let the reader imagine himself looking at a motion picture screen. The setting is a New England country road in winter. Into the picture from the lower right side of the frame comes a one-horse sleigh, which, as it glides along the road, describes a curving motion over the screen, first to the left and then upward to the right. It then begins curving to the left again, when the scene is suddenly cut. The effect on our eyes at this moment is such that we expect a continuation of motion toward the left, a completion of the swing. And this is just what we get in the next picture, which shows, not the sleigh at all, but the motion of the landscape gliding by, from right to left, as the sleigh-riders themselves might have seen it. We feel a pleasure of the eye somewhat akin to the pleasure of our ears when a musician strikes a note which the melody has led us to expect. Griffith's touch of art in

this joining is especially delightful because it is so subtle that any spectator, though he would surely feel it, would not observe it unless he were especially occupied in the analysis of motion on the screen.

Sometimes two scenes may be joined in perfect harmony of motions and yet show a conflict of meanings. In "The Love Light," above mentioned, we have one scene where the hero is about to take refuge in the cellar beneath the room occupied by the heroine. He raises a trap door, goes down the steps, and, as he descends slowly, closes the door behind him. This downward-swinging motion of the door is in our eyes when the scene is cut, and the next instant we see the outer door of the house swinging open suddenly as the heroine rushes out into the yard. The motions of the two doors are in perfect unity and balance, but we are shocked nevertheless, because, since our minds and eyes were on the hero in the cellar, we had expected another view of him beneath the trap door.

But there are worse compositions than this in the movie theaters. Sometimes whole plays are out of unity from beginning to end. A notorious example was a photoplay called "The Birth of a Race," which began with Adam and Eve and ended up with visions of the future, touching as it ran such things as little Moses and the Daughter of Pharaoh, the slave drivers of Egypt, the exodus of Israel, the crucifixion of Christ, the three ships of Columbus, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, the World War, German spies, steel works in the United States, a strike of the workers, etc., etc. All of these scenes were badly joined, but the greatest shock of all came when the

action jumped in a flash from Christ and the two thieves writhing in crucifixion to the three ships of Columbus heeling gracefully in a light breeze.

Merely to hint at the contents of such a play is, we hope, sufficient criticism. Without harmony of subject matter there certainly can be no harmony of treatment. And if the director of "The Birth of a Race" offers as his defense that he did not write the story, we can only retort that he should not have picturized it. Even when the subject matter is in continuous unity it requires a skillful, painstaking, sincere director to weave its various materials into a single harmony of impressiveness.

Perhaps we have continued long enough the discussion of the many-sided nature and the artistic value of pictorial motions at rest. Let us simply add that the kind of rest we have in mind is never the rest of inaction, of sleep, or of death; it is rather a dynamic repose. Just as the still portions of the motion picture may be active upon the spectator's mind, so the motions may be reposeful while they are both at work and at play. Such harmony of pictorial motions on the screen is not too high an ideal for the lovers of the cinema. The glimpses we get of that ideal now are enough to assure us that as time goes on more and more directors will be filled with inspiration and will achieve triumphant expression through their chosen art.

CHAPTER X

MASTERY IN THE MOVIES

WHO is the legitimate master in movie making? It is, of course, the director, and he should take complete command over the plot action of the photoplay, over the players and their accessories, over the settings and those who make the settings, over the camera men, over the cutters, joiners, and title writers; in short, over all those who are co-workers in photoplay making. If this mastery cannot be obtained; if writers and players and scene painters will not agree to shed their royal purple for the badge of service; if all those who co-operate in making a photoplay cannot see that the product must be judged by its total effect and not by mere details of performance, then, of course we shall never have art upon the screen.

But it is usually very difficult for the director to take and keep complete command. Among the first rebels against his authority is the writer of the story which is to be filmed. It would be best, of course, if the director could originate his own plot, as a painter conceives his idea for a painting, or if he could, at least, prepare his own scenario as studiously as the painter makes his own preliminary sketches for a painting. But, under the present system, these two tasks of movie making can only in exceptional cases be performed in detail by the same person. The next

best thing, then, is for the writer to limit himself to the bare subject matter of a picture, that is, the general action in which the characters are involved, while the director takes the responsibility for the pictorial treatment of this subject matter.

Now comes an interesting question. Which has the more artistic weight on the screen, the treatment of the subject, that is the presentation of the story pictorially, or the subject as such regardless of its presentation? The same question may be asked of any masterpiece of art; is it distinctive because of the subject matter or because of what the artist has done to that subject matter? In other words, would the subject matter remain distinctive even if it were badly treated?

There are sometimes happenings in real life that can hold one's unwavering attention, no matter how poorly presented in language or picture. For example, if a panic-stricken idiot were to rush to you and say, "It were quick, oh, explosion by Wall Street and lots of fellers shut up dead and J. P. Morgan's windows all over bloody men every way," you would be shocked—not amused—and you would not stop to consider the ridiculous language of the report. And if by some strange coincidence a camera man had secured a motion picture of that explosion in Wall Street, you would be curious to see that picture, and would undoubtedly be impressed by it, no matter how ineffective might be its photography or pictorial composition.

In fiction there may be certain chains of incidents, such as the action of a detective story, which might carry a strong dramatic appeal, even though the lan-

guage of the narrator were crude, confused, obscure, weak, and of no beauty appropriate to the thing expressed. "There may be," we say; but all self-respecting writers will agree with us that language-proof stories are extremely rare. The story is usually impressive because of the telling, and not in spite of it.

In the motion picture, naturally, the telling is not in words, but in arrangements of lines and shapes, of tones and textures, of lights and shadows, these values being either fixed or changing, and exhibited simultaneously or in succession. Whatever arrangement the director makes comes directly to us in the theater. Barring accident we see it unchanged on the screen, and, as far as we are concerned, it is the only treatment which the story has.

It is true, of course, that cinematographic treatment may be vaguely suggested by written or spoken words; it may be more definitely suggested by drawings; but it can never actually be given either by words or drawings. Even the director himself cannot know definitely, in advance of the actual rehearsing and taking of the picture, just what the composition will be. He may plan in advance, but he does not actually compose until the players are on the scene and the camera "grinding." During those moments are created the actual designs which become fixed permanently in the film.

Turning from pictures for a moment, let us consider the relation between plot and treatment in literary art. It is interesting to study Shakespeare's attitude toward the material which he borrowed for his plays. Glance through the introduction and notes of any school text, and you will see that the plot which

came to his hand ready-made was not held sacred. He twisted it, tore out pieces from it, or spun it together with other plots similarly altered. And even then the altered plot, though an improvement over the raw material, was not a masterpiece; it was only a better framework for masterly treatment.

In the art of Shakespeare it is the telling, not the framework, of the story that counts. Hence any play of his becomes a poor thing indeed if you take away from it the tone-color of his words, the rhythm of his lines, the imaginative appeal of his imagery, the stimulating truth in his casual comment on character and deed. When a play of Shakespeare is filmed, those literary values are lost; it cannot in the nature of the motion picture be otherwise.

On the other hand, the distinctive value and particular charm of a photoplay lies in its pictorial treatment, in what the director does pictorially with the subject in hand. And that distinctive value would in turn be lost if some one else attempted to transfer the picture to a literary medium.

In view of all this it is surely fair to say that if a writer and a picture-maker were to co-operate in producing a piece of literature, the writer should be in command; but when they co-operate in producing a picture the picture-maker should be in command.

Now when the director is in command of the story, what does he do with it? He may permit the incidents to stand in their original order, or he may change or omit or add. But in any case he sweeps away the phrases, sentences, and paragraphs which describe the places of the action, and erects instead real settings, or selects suitable "locations" from already existing set-

tings. He marshals forth real human beings to perform the parts which are described in words. He divides the action into limited periods of time, and decides how to connect these periods visually so that the pictorial movement on the screen may be a flowing unity. The director, not the writer, does this; and, if he were satisfied to do less, he would be only partly a director. His work is not the "translation" of literature into motion pictures; it is a complete substitution of motion pictures for literature.

When we analyze pictorial composition on the screen we must proceed as we have done throughout this book. We must look at it from the point of view of the spectator in the theater. The spectator does not see the setting with one eye and the actors with the other, he does not separate the respective movements of human beings, animals, trees, water, fire, etc., as they play before him, and he does not disconnect any one scene from the scenes which precede or follow it. To him everything on the screen is connected with everything else there. The connection may be strong or weak, bad or beautiful, but it is nevertheless a connection. This ought to be clear enough to any one who gives the matter any thought; yet there are scene designers who appear to believe that their setting is a complete work of art quite independent of the actors, for whom and with whom it ought to be composed, and there are certainly any number of players who look upon themselves as stars that dwell apart.

We do not underestimate the individual power of the player as an interpreter of the deeds and emotions of dramatic characters. Pantomimic acting is one of

the most personal of arts, yet the acting in a photoplay is a somewhat smaller factor in the total result than acting in the stage pantomime; and neither kind of acting can compare in importance with acting in the stage play, where the magic of the actor's voice works its spell upon the audience.

In the photoplay the player, whether at rest or in action, is usually the emphatic part of the picture; but he is only a part, and the relation between that part and the other parts of the picture can best be established by the director. If the player attempts to compose the picture in which he appears, he is handicapped, not only because he cannot see himself, but also because he cannot see any other portion of the composition from the same point of view as the ultimate spectator who is temporarily represented by the director. He is, in fact, in danger of spoiling his own pantomime, of destroying his own power.

The frequent abuse of the close-up, for example, is often due to the mistaken idea that an actor's facial expression is the sole means of representing emotion. To think that dramatic pantomime consists of making faces is just as foolish as to think that dancing is merely a matter of shaking the feet and legs. It is really as important for a screen actress to be able to show grief with her elbows or knees as for a dancer to have rhythm in her neck. The "star" actress, therefore, who insists on several facial close-ups per reel reveals a lack of capability in her own art, as well as an over-developed appreciation of her own looks. The further objection to the close-up is that it takes the player out of the picture. For the moment all the setting, all the other players are shut off from sight.

It is as though a painter, while entertaining a group of friends with a view of a newly finished work, were suddenly to cover the whole painting except a single spot, and then to say, "Now forget the rest of the picture, and just look at this spot. Isn't it wonderful?"

The player should, of course, always be in perfect union with the rest of the picture, yet carrying as much emphasis as the story demands. But even when the player wisely desires to remain in the picture, he should not be allowed to determine his own position, pose, or movement there. He is, after all, only a glorified model with which the artist works.

When an actress moves about in a room, for example, she cannot know that to the eye of the camera her nose seems to collide with the corner of the mantelpiece, that her neck is pressed out of shape by a bad shadow, that her gesture points out some gim-crack of no dramatic significance at the moment, that her movement is throwing her out of balance with some other movement in the scene, that her walking, sitting, or rising appears awkward, in spite of the fact that it feels natural and rhythmical to her. These and a thousand other accidents of composition can be avoided only by the player's instant obedience to an alert and masterful director who can stop or guide the moving factor in the picture as surely as a painter can stop or guide his brush.

When the action takes place out of doors, or in an interior setting with considerable depth, the player is still more ignorant of what the composition looks like to the eye of the camera. Whether the movement of a particular person will harmonize with a

swaying willow tree and with the shadows playing over the ground, can be discovered only by experiments viewed from the angle of the camera. And even then, after the action has been carefully planned through a succession of rehearsals, it may have to be varied during the actual "shooting." A sudden change of wind or light or an unexpected movement of a dog or horse may bring in a new factor that must be instantly taken into account.

At the beginning and end of a scene the player should be especially pliable under the hands of the director, because the latter alone knows what the cinematic connection is to be with the preceding and following scenes. The lack of control in this pictorial continuity is often evident on the screen. Separate scenes become little dramas in themselves, and the whole photoplay is then really a succession of acts, with a structure always tending to fall apart, instead of cohering firmly into a unity. The peculiar difficulty in the movies is that the scenes are not taken in the same order as they are projected in the theater. On the screen the scenes shift more quickly than the actors could pass from one setting to the next, and yet the actual taking of those actions may have been weeks or even months apart. This is so because it is more economical to let the particular setting, and not the continuity of action, determine the grouping of the "shots."

Thus, for example, the scenes numbered 9, 22, 25, 41, 98, and 133, with a drawing-room as setting, may all be taken on a single day, while numbers 8, 40, and 134, with a street as setting, may be taken some other day. And still another group of disconnected

scenes may be taken a month later "on location" hundreds of miles away. This may be a fine system of efficiency for the manufacturer, but it often plays havoc with pictorial continuity. When an actress goes directly from scene 98 to 133, for example, she may be able to remember whether the latter scene is supposed to find her still single or already divorced, but she cannot be allowed to determine her own positions, pauses, tempo and general nature of movement, because that might spoil the transition from scene 132, which is not to be "shot" until several days later!

The farther we go into the study of the relation between the player and the rest of the motion picture, the more we realize that this relation can best be established and controlled by the director, and that the player is, in a sense, only a pigment with which the director paints.

"But what of the movie fans?" you ask. "Are they not more interested in the performer as a performer than in the play as a play, or in the picture as a picture?" Yes, the audience is undoubtedly "crazy about the star," but that is largely because they have not been given anything else to be crazy about. It is true that we all admire the distinction of individual performers in any kind of entertainment; yet we would not approve of a football game, for example, in which the "star" half-back made so many brilliant plays that the rest of the eleven could not prevent the opposing team from piling up a winning score, or of a baseball game which was lost because the batter with a world's record refused to make a "sacrifice hit." And, besides, a distinguished actor or actress may remain distinguished even after having submitted to the direct-

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Portrait of Charles I, a painting by Van Dyck. The composition is characterized by rhythm of tone and line, balance of design, and skilful subordination of interests. Many of the principles that underlie good painting may be successfully applied in a motion picture. See page 80.

ing of the master cinema composer, just as a figure in a painting may still be fascinating even though the painter has made it a thoroughly organic part of the whole composition.

As the figure is really only a part of the motion picture so the setting is also only a part, and neither the setting nor the figure should be considered sufficient unto itself. One without the other is really incomplete; together they can be organized into a unified picture. This simple truth, always recognized by painters, has often been ignored, both by stage directors and motion picture directors. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the materials with which the three different composers work. In a painting both the figure and the background are only paint, only representations side by side on a flat surface, and therefore easily admit of a perfect fusion of material. But in the case of stage drama the situation is different. The stage composition does not give us a similar natural blending of actor and background. The actor is a real human being, so near the spectators that some of them could touch him with their hands, while the background is merely an artificial representation of a room, a garden, or a cliff. The two elements of the stage picture refuse to mix, and the average spectator seems quite content to take them separately. In fact, it is not unusual for the audience to "give the scenery a hand" long before a single figure has entered to complete the composition.

Now the screen picture is entirely different from the stage picture, because on the screen everything we see is photographic representation, mere gradations of light and shadow, just as everything on the canvas

of a painting is paint. In the motion picture without color the boundary line of a window or a table is described in exactly the same medium as the contour of an actor's face; and the actor's complexion differs from the wall paper only in being lighter or darker. It should be impossible, therefore, to consider that the photoplay setting is a complete, independent picture, and that the actors are separate visible things merely placed in front of the setting. And if the movie director makes the mistake of not fusing actor and setting into a pictorial composition, it is perhaps because he imagine the spectator with himself in the studio, where the scene and action are like those of the stage, instead of putting himself with the spectator before the screen.

But there are signs of awakening in the theater of the stage play. More and more the influence of such European masters as Max Reinhardt and Gordon Craig is being felt. According to their method of production the setting and the actors are interdependent and make a co-operative appeal to the eye of the audience. The young designers in the United States are beginning to think of the dramatic picture as a whole, rather than of the setting as a self-sufficient exhibition of their skill in painting. Mr. Lee Simonson, for example, not long ago, in commenting on his designs for the Theater Guild's production of "The Faithful," said that he purposely designed his sets so that they would seem top-heavy until the actors entered and filled in the comparatively empty zone near the bottom of the stage picture. Without the presence of the actor, he declared, one could never say that the set was good or bad; one could only say that it was

incomplete. Such reasoning would do a great deal of good in the movie studios, from which a vast amount of silly publicity "dope" has come, announcing that this or that photoplay was highly artistic because such-and-such a well-known painter had been engaged to design the interior settings. One might as well say that a certain art student's mural decoration was good because a famous master had begun the work by painting a background for the figures, or that a piece of music was beautiful because a master composer had written an accompaniment which somebody else had afterward combined with a melody.

In the cinema composition the director must, of course, have mastery over the places, as well as over the persons of a film story. He can then make the setting a live, active part of the picture instead of merely a dead background; he may truly dramatize it.* A notable example of the perfect blending of dramatic theme, actors, and setting is the German photoplay "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," which was first shown to the American public in April, 1921. This film, produced by the Decla Company, was directed by Mr. Robert Wien, and the scenic designs were made by Herman Warm, Walter Reiman, and Walter Rork. When the "movie fan" sees the beginning of this photoplay he is startled by the strange shapes of places. Houses and rooms are not laid out four-square, but look as though they had been built by a cyclone and finished up by a thunderstorm. Windows are sick triangles, floors are misbehaved surfaces and shadows are streaked with gleaming white. Streets

* The subject of dramatizing a setting is discussed at length in Chapter VIII of "The Art of Photoplay Making."

writhe as though in distress and the skies are of the inky blackness that fills even strong men with foreboding. The people are equally bizarre. They resemble cartoons rather than fellow humans, and their minds are strangely warped.

In the presence of all this the spectator feels that the screen has gone mad; yet he does not leave the theater, because his attention is chained and his emotions are beginning to surge with a peculiarly pleasing unrest. He stays and stares at the remarkable fitness of these crazy people in crazy places; for the story is, in fact, a madman's fantasy of crimes committed by a sleep-walker under the hypnotic control of a physician who is the head of an insane asylum.

When we examine this photoplay critically we discover, not only that the settings are perfectly sympathetic with the action, but that the various factors are skillfully organized into an excellent pictorial composition. Look, for example, at the "still," facing page 179, and you will observe the uncanny emphasis upon the dark sleep-walker who slinks along the wall and a moment later turns upward into the hallway on his evil errand to the bed-chamber of the heroine. Place that figure in an ordinary village alley and it will lose half its horror; keep it out of this weird setting and the place will cry out for some one to come into it in pursuit of crime.

Study the plan of the pictorial design and you will see that as soon as the man has emerged from the shadows in the background he becomes the strongest accent in an area of white. The end of the alley from which he comes is accented by the jagged white shape above the shadows, and the doorway through which

he goes is similarly accented by irregular shapes. These two accents keep the composition in balance, and when our glance passes from one to the other the path of attention must cross the area of central interest. There is rhythm in the composition, too, though one would scarcely realize it at first glance. Note the swinging curves in the white patch on the street and in the corresponding patch on the wall, and note also how some of these curves harmonize with the lines of the actor's body and with his shadow upon the wall.

The "still" which we have just analyzed is typical of the cinema scenes throughout "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari." Whether the subject is the unscrupulous Doctor in his office within the gates of the insane asylum, or the unnatural sleep-walker cramped in his cabinet, or the innocent girl asleep in a sea of white coverlets, or the gawking villagers at the fake shows of the fair, the two factors of person and place complete each other in a masterly composition. But that composition as a whole was not made either by the actors or by the designers of settings; they were happily helpful, but the director was the master composer.

Any one who sees "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" is likely to remark that the settings would not be of much value in any story except the one for which they were designed. What a fine compliment to this photoplay as art! Perhaps some one long ago in the gray dawn of musical composition made a remark that the accompaniment in a certain piece of music could hardly serve for another melody than the one for which it was composed! At any rate let us hope

that in the future the lover of the films may not look in vain for weird stories in uncanny haunts, for fairy tales in whimsical nooks, for epic dramas in spacious domains, for comedies in funny places; and let us hope, too, that he will find the compositions so perfect that not a single setting would have any artistic value apart from its own story.

"But what of nature?" says some one. "Must the movie director have mastery over the works of the Creator, too?" Indeed he must! Because if he is an artist he is a creator; and if nature becomes a medium in his art, then he must have mastery over that medium insofar as it enters the art. Hills have been levelled, streams have been dried up, and valleys have been filled with water, all for the welfare or profit of man. Mastery of this kind costs money; but are not the movie magnates noted for their fearlessness in signing checks?

Wealthy men have been known to build landscapes for their own pleasure; there is no very valid reason why they should not build landscapes for their own business, especially when that business is an art. The movie director of to-day wears out automobiles searching the country for "locations" that will do as natural backgrounds for screen stories; and in this enthusiasm he is almost as amateurish as the kodak fiend who scours the country for good things to snap. The movie director of some to-morrow will not look for natural backgrounds; he will make them.

When an artist paints a picture of a natural subject he does not try to reproduce exactly the material things which he sees before him. He rises far above the craft of the copyist into the divinity of creation. His

painting is always a personal variation of the natural theme. If seven trees suit his composition better than the seventeen which he views, he paints only seven, and if there are only five in the grove, he creates two more on his canvas. If the waterfall is too high or too violent he reshapes it into the ideal one of his vision. This he does, not because nature is not beautiful in most of her aspects, but because no single one of those aspects fits into the scheme of the new beauty which he as an artist is trying to create.

But the cinema composer does not work in so plastic a medium as paint. The camera is only a recording machine, working without the power of altering what it sees. The subject must be altered by the director before the camera man begins "shooting." On a small scale this is perhaps already being done. Bushes, for example, may be cleared out from among the trees, and possibly even a tree or two may be chopped down in order to facilitate the carrying on of certain dramatic actions. We should like to see the ax wielded also in the cause of such things as simplicity, or balance, or rhythm in pictorial composition. Already bridges are being built especially for certain scenes in photoplays. We should like to see the cinema engineers called upon also to put an extra bend in the creek, or to make the waterfall only half as large, or to shape the bank into a more graceful slope whenever any change of that sort might serve to organize the setting more harmoniously with the general design of the picture.

Already grass has been mown to suit a director. We should like to see grass grown especially for the

director. They already make sunshine and wind and rain for motion pictures. We should like to see trees planted and tended for a dozen or fifty years, if necessary, in order to provide a more pictorial natural background for one or a dozen film stories.

In thus advocating a new art of cinema landscape gardening we do not mean to imply that nature untouched is not full of beauty. We know well enough that the rhythm of line in the horizon of a rolling country, or in the lights and shadows of trees massed in the distance is often a delight to the beholder. But natural beauty of that sort is admissible to a cinema composition only when it is itself the dramatic theme of the story, and can be emphasized by the introduction of human figures or other elements, or when it can be subordinated to something else which is the dramatic theme. If nature cannot be thus composed she may still be photographed by the maker of scenics, travel pictures, etc., but she is of no practical value to the director of photoplays.

But there is perhaps a question brewing in some reader's mind. "Would it not be ridiculously extravagant," he asks, "to construct a real landscape especially for a photoplay, since you maintain that any particular setting, if it is a proper part of a good composition, will have little artistic value apart from the particular action for which it has been designed?"

Yes, it would certainly be extravagant to spend ten years producing a natural setting which could be used only for two days of movie "shooting." But our theories really do not lead to any such conclusion. First, any landscape which has been designed especially for cinema composition, can be "shot" from fifty or

a hundred different points of view, and yet can have separate artistic value from every angle. And, second, any such landscape would alter itself periodically and gradually through seasons and years. And, third, the cinema landscape engineer could make considerable alterations again and again without destroying the landscape. Thus, even if only a single square mile of land were used, it might well serve a film company for a number of years; and meanwhile other landscapes would be in the making on other square miles of land. However, it is not the critic's business to enter into the ways and means of financing the production of art. He only undertakes to express the refined taste of the thoughtful public, the public which in the long run it will pay the producers to please.

We desire the director's mastery in the movies to extend also to that phase of pictorial composition which is known as the "cutting and joining" of scenes. Bad work in this department of photoplay making is something which cannot be counteracted by the most inspired pantomime, by the most beautiful setting, or by the most perfect composition in the separate scenes. Without careful cutting and joining the photoplay can never achieve that dynamic movement, that rhythmical flow which is a characteristic and distinguishing quality of the motion picture as art. It should be as important for the cinema composer to decide upon the progression and transformation of scenes as it is for the poet to arrange the order and transitions of his own verses and stanzas, or for the musical composer to arrange the movement through the music which he writes. Some directors seem to forget that a piece

of art can exert its power only through that final form which comes in direct contact with the appreciator. And many of the others who desire to preserve their work intact must gnash their teeth at the thought that no matter how carefully they may cut and join a film, it is likely to be marred before it reaches the projecting machine.

An example of the amazing lack of artistic cooperation in the movie world is furnished by the following press notice, sent out from one of the largest moving picture theaters on Broadway. "Audiences who see a film projected on the screen at the ——— Theater, seldom take the details connected with its showing into consideration. It is a well-known fact that a photoplay is seldom presented at the ——— in the form it is received from the manufacturer. Every foot of film is carefully perused and cuts are made, either for complete elimination or for replacement in a more appropriate part of the story."

Add to such deliberate desecration the havoc wrought by censors and by the eliminations caused by fire or breakage and you have a prospect of butchery which is bad enough to make any artist drop his work in despair. There is no hope for him unless he can organize his photoplay so perfectly and make its definite final form so compellingly beautiful that even a dull mechanician in a projecting booth would recognize it as a sacred thing which must be kept intact as it came from the hands of the master.

But a photoplay is often robbed of pictorial continuity long before it reaches the exhibitor. The "title-writer," who frequently combines his office with that of "cutter," is at best, a dangerous collaborator

on a photoplay. Words in the form of titles, subtitles, dialogue, comments, etc., are rarely in place on the screen. If they are admitted for the purpose of telling or explaining a part of the story, they come as a slur on the art of the motion picture, and often as an insult to the intelligence of the spectator.* Nevertheless, the producer finds words practically useful as stop-gaps, padding, and general support for an ill-directed play that would otherwise have to be scrapped. And even the most prominent directors are inclined to lean heavily on words. We are doomed, therefore, to endure the hybrid art of reading matter mixed with illustrations, at least for many years to come. But we insist that this mixture shall be no worse then the director makes it.

After a director has carefully composed a series of scenes so that the motions and patterns and textures and tones dissolve, from one moment to the next, in a rhythmical flow, regardless of how the story may have shifted its setting, we do not want some film doctor to come along and break that unity into pieces for the sake of a few jokes, or near-jokes, or for a few words of schoolroom wisdom or of sentimental gush. We object, not only to the content, the denotation of such "titles," but also to their pictorial appearance.

That written words have pictorial appearance is a fact which most of us forgot as soon as we learned to read. We realize that Chinese characters or Egyp-

*Words which appear as an organic part of the action, such as writing, print, sign-boards, etc., do not come under the general category of "cut-in titles." For a discussion of the dramatic value of words on the screen see Chapter IX of "The Art of Photoplay Making."

tian hieroglyphics are pictorial, that they are drawings; but we forget that the characters and arrangements of our own writing and printing are also drawings. Judged as pictures the words on the screen are usually too severely white for the background. They fairly flash at you. Also the horizontal lines made by the tops and bottoms of the letters constitute a sort of grill-work which hardly ever blends pictorially with the pattern of the preceding or following scene.

As to the design of the letters themselves we find considerable variety on the screen, often with no direct reference to the meaning of the words or to the picture where they are inserted. Thus the tendency to introduce y's and g's with magnificent sweeping tails, or capital letters in fantastic curves, while revealing a commendable impulse to make writing pictorial, often leads to overemphasis, or to a direct conflict with other pictorial values in the film.*

Furthermore, the eye-movement over reading matter should be considered with reference to the eye-movement over the adjoining pictures. For example, after the title has been shown long enough to allow the normal reader to get to the end of the text, his eye may be at a point near the lower right corner or at the right side of the frame. Then if the following picture does not attract attention at this portion of the frame, a slight shock is caused by the necessary jump to a remote point of attention. A similar difficulty may arise in connecting a preceding picture with the beginning of the title.

Many directors have endeavored to make the title

*A neat pictorial touch in the titles of the German play, "The Golem," is the suggestion of Hebrew script in the shaping of the letters.

sections of a film more pictorial by introducing decorative drawings or paintings around the words, and even by introducing miniature motion pictures. Decorations in motion, however, are not to be recommended, because they distract attention from the words of the title, as has been illustrated in the discussion of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," on page 46, and because they do not readily compose with those words to form a single picture. It is, in fact, as inartistic to "vision in" motion pictures on the background of a title as to "vision in" words on the background of a motion picture. In either case you really get two pictures within one frame.

Fixed decorations around a title may fill a pictorial need in unifying the portions of the film which have been cut apart by the insert. They may bridge the gap with a continuity of tone or line or shape, and may by their meaning preserve the dramatic mood of the photoplay. But here, too, caution must be observed lest the decorations draw attention away from the words or fail to compose well with the pictorial character of those words.

The problem of words on the screen does not seem very near a solution. There will doubtless be a great deal of juggling with titles before some magician comes who can "vanish" them completely from the fabric of a photoplay. Already photoplays such as "The Old Swimmin' Hole," directed by Joseph De Grasse and "The Journey's End," directed by Hugo Ballin, have been successfully produced without subtitles. Some day, we hope, the wordless picture play will no longer be a novelty.

Another factor, which has already become troublesome, is the reproduction of color in the motion pic-

ture. If the director were a genuine colorist, and if he could produce the exact tint or shade of hue which the particular composition needs, and if this could be projected so that the spectator would really see what the director wanted him to see, then the conditions would be ideal for mastery in color movies. Such conditions may some day come, but they are not here now.

It is possible that the machinery of color photography will become so perfect that the spectator may be able to see on the screen the exact color values which were found in the subject photographed. But that will be only a triumph of science. It will be a scientific achievement of the same kind as the correct reproduction of colors in a lithograph or color-gravure of a painting. But art lies in the production and arrangement, not in the reproduction, of colors.

An elementary study of painting must convince any one that the colors which the artist puts on the canvas are really only suggested by the model or subject, and that his arrangement of them is inspired by an ideal personal conception, rather than a desire to reproduce something with absolute accuracy. Therein lies creation and mastery. Hence, there is no artistic advantage to a cinema composer in having machines which can make a green dress appear green, and a red rose, red, on the screen, unless that particular green and that particular red in that particular combination really add beauty to the picture.

The "tinted" scenes, usually blue or orange, which are so familiar in the movies, are not color photographs, since they are produced by immersing an ordinary black and white film in a bath of dye. But from an artistic point of view they are better than

color photographs. In the first place, the value of the tint can be controlled by the director, or at least by the person who does the tinting. And in the second place, although the lights of the film take the strongest tint, the shadows are also affected by it; and the entire picture, therefore, gets a tonal unity which is never present in color photography. However, even "tinted" scenes should be used with caution, because, when they are cut into a film which is elsewhere black and white, they break the unity of tonal flow, and usually get far more emphasis than their meaning in the story demands. The effect is almost as bad as that of the old family photograph which baby sister has improved by touching up a single figure with pretty water colors.

Thus we have indicated the many departments and stages of development in a photoplay composition, the many pictorial forces which should be controlled by a single hand. That single hand holds the reins of many powers. And, if those powers cannot be so guided that they pull in the same direction, with similar speeds, and with balanced efforts, then their combination is disastrous, however elegant and blue-ribboned any individual power may be. In the photoplay neither the plot action, nor the acting, nor the setting, nor the cutting and joining, nor the titles, nor the coloring, nor any other element can be allowed to pull in its own wild way. And in any single section of the motion picture the fixed design and the movement, the accentuation and the harmony, the work and the play, must be co-ordinated and all this technique must itself be subordinate to spontaneous enduring inspiration. Without such mastery no moviemaker can ever win to the far goal of art.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERIOUS EMOTIONS OF ART

THE end of all aspiring mastery in the movies is to provide for every beholder the thrills of art. These thrills are not like the emotions which are aroused by other experiences of life, by sports, for example, or adventure, or amusements, or industry, or war. They are stirring experiences quite different from those of him who makes a "home run" or a "touchdown," or "loops the loop" in the air, or sinks a submarine, or has a play accepted, or discovers a new way of evading some obnoxious law. It is true that the dramatic content of a photoplay may sometimes seem so real that the beholder forgets where he is and responds with such natural feelings as fear and triumph, love and hate, pride, selfish desire and hope; but it is also true that the pictorial form of a photoplay, that is, the mere arrangement of the substance, considered apart from its meaning, can arouse strange, pleasurable emotions which are peculiar to the enjoyment of art.

When we recall the masterpieces of painting which have thrilled us we must admit that much of their appeal came from other factors besides the content of the picture. Think of a portrait of some Dutchman painted by Rembrandt. The painting stirs you as the Dutchman himself in real life never could have

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From *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.* A remarkable example of "stylization" in the movies, showing how setting figure, and action may be harmonized to express the dominant mood of the photoplay. See pages 165 and 180.

stirred you. You may be impressed by the likeness of the portrait, by the engaging character of the person portrayed, and by some significant truth expressed in that portrayal. But that is not all. You are also stirred by the colors in the painting, by the peculiar arrangement of lines and shapes. That emotion which you get from the form and medium itself, rather than from the subject, is a characteristic art-emotion.

We are not now speaking of such qualities as unity, emphasis, balance, and rhythm. They are indeed fundamental needs in pictorial composition, and yet a photoplay may have all of those qualities without possessing any strong appeal as art. A motion picture, like a painting, must possess other, more subtle, qualities if it is to make any lasting impression upon our souls. What these mysterious qualities really are, we do not presume to know. At the same time we believe that a discussion of them will be stimulating and helpful both to "movie fans" and movie makers. Suppose we endeavor to isolate four of these mysterious qualities in art and call them poignancy, appeal to the imagination, exquisiteness, and reserve.

Any one who goes frequently to the movies must have felt more than once a certain poignancy, a strange fascination in some pictorial arrangement, in some curiously appealing movement on the screen. Perhaps such a feeling came when you saw a "dissolve" for the first time. Perhaps the slow dying away of a scene, even while a new one was dawning before you, gave a pang of pleasure never felt before, not even in the magic blending of dreams. A "queer feeling" you may have called it, and you may have been less aware of it as the novelty wore off in later shows.

Then it came again when you saw an accelerated motion picture which showed a plant growing from seed to blossom within a few minutes. And still again you felt it when in some slow-motion picture you saw a horse floating through the air. But time went on and the frequent repetition of these effects made their appeal less poignant.

In each case the thing that stirred you was due to a novelty of mechanics, a trick of cinematography. But you can get that emotion without waiting for a new mechanical invention. It may come also from the pictorial composition, from some peculiar patternings of things, whether fixed or moving, within the picture itself. A striking illustration of this may be found in the German photoplay, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," which has been described in the preceding chapter. It contains at least two scenes in which extremely simple arrangements kindle strange flares of emotion. One of these moments comes in the scene which is represented by the "still" shown opposite page 179. Here we see Cesare, the hynotized sleep-walker, slinking along an alley of weird lights and shadows. We know from earlier scenes that he is bent on committing some new crime. His face is ghastly and his lanky frame is tightly clothed in black. He emerges into a bright glare and stretches forth his arm in an unhuman gesture, as though he were going to glide serpent-wise up the very side of the wall. This movement makes a strange pattern and sends through us a flash of—shall we call it a sweet shudder or a horrible delight?—something poignant and unforgettable.

A similar experience of emotion comes to us a few

minutes later in the same play when Cesare carries off the heroine from her bedchamber. This scene reveals a broad sea of billowy linen, evidently a bed, yet large enough for a whole bevy of heroines. Cesare appears outside a window, which seems to crumble at his touch. He enters the chamber and, dagger in hand, reaches out toward the head of the sleeping lady. We gasp at her fate, because we forget that this is only a play. That gasp is an expression of pity, a familiar emotion. But a mysterious emotion is in store for us. Cesare is spellbound by the lady's beauty. He drops his dagger. Then suddenly he gathers her up, and, holding her against the side of his body, starts for the window. As he does so a sudden striking pattern is produced by the movement. In his haste Cesare has caught up some of the bed linen along with his prey, and this white expanse darts after him in a sudden inward-rushing movement from the remote corners of the bed. Instantly a strange sensation shoots through us. This sharp emotion, both painful and pleasing, is not pity, or hate, or fear. It does not relate itself to the villain's violence against an innocent, defenseless girl. It is merely a "queer feeling" caused by that striking motion-pattern of the snowy linen whisked unexpectedly from the bed.

To one who has been emotionally affected by such things as the "dissolve" and retarded motion and the peculiar effects in "Dr. Caligari" the above paragraphs may give some idea of what we mean by poignancy in composition. It is a real quality tinged with an unreality that allies it with the effects which we experience in dreams. Any cinema composer who can strike this note of poignancy at least once in every photoplay

that he produces may justly demand that his work be classed with the fine arts.

Another elusive quality, found all too seldom in the movies, is the appeal to imagination. Such an appeal may come from things in real life or from that life which art reflects; it may come also from the artist's medium and composition. Thus, for example, some people can imagine melodious sounds when they look at colors in a painting, and nearly every one can imagine colors when listening to music. The motion picture's appeal to the imagination has been treated at some length in Chapter VI of "The Art of Photoplay Making," and we shall, therefore, be brief about it here. An illustration may be furnished by a sea-shell. We hold it to our ears and hear a low musical sound which makes us imagine the surf of the sea, sweetly vague. A similar, yet more subtle, delight may come from a picture of some person doing the same thing. Such a picture is to be found in the Fox film version of Longfellow's "Evangeline." Gabriel picks up a sea-shell and holds it to his ear. Instantly we imagine the sound which he hears. We also imagine the sea which that imagined sound suggests. And, if we are particularly sensitive, we may even try to imagine what Gabriel imagines. All this is delightful, a genuine emotional response to the art of the screen. But we are immediately insulted by an ugly anti-climax. Quick as a flash, our fancies are killed by a cut-in picture of a stretch of real sea. Now we must look; we may no longer imagine.

The above is a typical example of both imaginative and unimaginative treatment in a motion picture. Any reader can go to the movies and collect a hundred

similar examples in a few evenings. Over and over again a director will lead us to the threshold of beautiful fancy, only to slam the door of hard realism against our faces. Why is this? Is it because the director thinks that audiences are incapable of exercising and enjoying their imaginations? Or is it only because he wants to get more footage for the film?

As though it were not bad enough to spoil the pictorial beauty of cinema composition, many directors proceed to spoil the charm of other arts, too. Poetry, for instance, may weave her spells elsewhere, but not upon the screen. Even the simplest poetic statement must be vulgarized by explanation. "Movie fans" are not considered intelligent enough to be trusted with the enjoyment of even such harmless imagery as

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which taken at the turn leads on to fortune."

During all the three hundred years since those lines were written, probably no illustrator of Shakespeare's plays ever felt called upon to draw a picture of that tide, and probably no actor ever strove to represent it on the stage by voice or gesture. But in De Mille's photoplay "Male and Female," where the passage is quoted, the lines on the screen must be accompanied by a photograph of surf, which was evidently intended to represent the tide!

Shakespeare's poetic image was thus killed by a single shot. But it sometimes take more ingenuity to destroy a charm. Take, for instance, this descriptive line from "Evangeline":

> "When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music."

Those words are surely full of emotional, imaginative appeal. Yes, but not for the director of the Fox "Evangeline." He inserts the line as a title, then shows Evangeline strolling over a forest path, and then "cuts in" a close-up of hands playing across the strings of a gigantic harp!

There is nothing mysterious about the emotions of any moderately intelligent person who sees things like that on the screen. "Movie stuff!" he groans, and wonders "how they have the nerve to get away with it." We have a quarrel with the director, not because he has failed to picturize the imagined sweetness of that silence which comes when exquisite music has ceased, but because he has considered it necessary to picturize anything at all in support of the poet's words.

This brings us again to the question whether art should strive to present any beauty other than that of the subject represented. Was he a great artist who, according to an old fable, painted fruit so realistically that the birds came to peck at it? And would Michelangelo have been a better artist if he had given his marble statues the colors of real flesh, or if he had made statues with flesh soft to the touch and capable of perspiring on a hot day? We think not.

Art may please through illusion, but never by deception. We get a peculiar emotional experience from imagining that Michelangelo's "Moses" is alive with human grandeur, but we should not like to be caught in a mob of idiots staring at some more realistically sculptural Moses, in the expectation that he was about to make a speech or perform a trick. Neither can we go into ecstasies over the fact that the fur mantle in

some portrait is so skillfully painted that all the women want to stroke it.

The depressing thing about many movies is that they are to the ideal photoplay what the wax figure of a shop window is to sculpture. Instead of dancing lightly through a rich atmosphere of suggestion they are anchored heavily with bolts of dollar-marked material. And worse days are to come if the "stunt" workers are fed with applause. They promise us pictures in natural colors, more natural than any now produced. They promise us pictures that have depth so real that the beholder may be tempted to take a stroll into them. They promise us pictures that talk, and whistle, and chirp, and bark. And perhaps somewhere they are even promising pictures that will give off scents.

All these wonders will create industrial activity. They will make good advertising, and will doubtless bring crowds to the theaters. But they will not bring happiness to those fortunate individuals who can enjoy art because it is art, who can get a finer thrill from a painting that felicitously suggests interesting trees, than from one which looks so much like a real orchard that the birds and bees swarm in through the gallery doors.

Let the motion picture look like a motion picture of life, and not like life itself. Let the mobilization of characters in a photoplay start fancies and stir emotions finer and deeper than any which we can experience by observing our neighbors or by reading sensational newspapers. Let the lights and shadows on the screen, the lines and shapes, the patterns and movements suggest to our imaginations richer beauties than

those which are actually shown to our eyes. Let the motion picture become as romantic as music, and yet remain equally consistent with reality and truth.

Thus we have considered two mysterious art-emotions, namely, that which is aroused by a peculiar artistic poignancy in the cinema design itself, and that which is aroused when the suggestions and associations of the design make our own imaginations creative. A third art-emotion comes from the conscious or sub-conscious appreciation of something exquisite in the finished product.

Exquisite values and exquisite combinations are present in the masterpieces of every art. The sweet blending of musical tones which leads into a delicacy of overtones that no ear can distinguish; the subtle shadings of color in a painting, soft touches of pictorial harmony which can be felt more surely than they can be seen; tender curves in the most vigorous statue, and marble surfaces surging so slightly that their shadows scarcely linger; crisp edges of acanthus leaves in a Greek capital and the almost imperceptible swelling of the column beneath; the sparkle, the caper and the organ-music of a poem you love—these are the exquisite things in art. And there are many others less tangible. They thrill you again and again with feelings too refined for description in words.

Can the motion picture achieve a similar refinement? Or must it always deserve the epithet "crude"? When half of the typical movie's brute strength and snorting speed can be exchanged for tenderness and spirituality we shall have a new era in cinema history. That era may dawn while the doubters are still slumbering. Even now we occasionally see motion pictures

which are sparkling without the so-called "flashes" of scenes, pictures which flow firmly, one into the next, with delicate mingling of tones and patterns, pictures in which sometimes the moving elements are as airy as gossamer threads blown by a fairy's breath.

This quality of exquisiteness is something which the director cannot produce by taking thought or signing a contract. Other values he may develop by study and experiment, but not this one. He may bring balance and unity to his pictorial elements; he may accent the interests properly; he may succeed in starting a vital rhythm and stimulating the beholder's fancy, all this through determined application of skill; but he will need the help of inspiration before he can create the charm of exquisiteness. The gods have granted that mysterious help to other artists; they will grant it to the cinema composer, too, whenever he proves worthy.

There is at least another peculiar art-emotion which the cinema composer should be able to arouse. It is the emotion which comes over us at the overwhelming discovery that a given masterpiece of art has a wealth of beauty that we can never hope to exhaust. That emotion is stimulated by the reserve which lies back of all really masterful performance in art. We feel it when we have read a poem for the twentieth time and know that if we read it again we shall find new beauties and deeper meaning. We feel it in a concert hall listening to a symphony that has been played for us repeatedly since childhood and yet reveals fresh beauties to our maturing powers of appreciation. We feel it in the mystic dimness of some cathedral beneath whose arches a score of generations have prayed and

the most eloquent disbeliever of today stands gaping in silence. Behind the human power which wrote the poem, or composed the music, or built the cathedral lies a vast reserve; and, though it was not drawn upon, we seem to glimpse that reserve forever in the finished masterpiece.

Has any reader of this book gone to see the same photoplay ten times? And if so, why? Was it because of some irresistible, undying lure in the content of that photoplay or in the pictorial form of that content? Did you go of your own free will? Did you even make a sacrifice to see it the tenth time? If so, then you have known the calm joy of a reserve power in the newest of the arts.

Unfortunately reserve is not characteristic of the movies. It is seldom indeed that a photoplay contains anything of value that cannot be caught during the first showing. In fact, it happens rather frequently that a photoplay uses up every ounce of its own proper power and then is forced to call in the help of something known as "padding" before it measures up to the commercial fullness of five reels, or whatever the contract stipulates. If you poke around through this padding, you will find that it is usually made up of innocent kittens, ducklings, calves, human babies, and other "ain't-it-cunnin' " stuff, which may arouse emotions, to be sure, but not the emotions which make up the enjoyment of art as art.

Another typical lack of reserve is illustrated in the building and decoration of settings. Avalanches of furniture are apparently necessary to show that a character is well-to-do. The heroine's boudoir must look like a gift shop, and her dressing table like a drug

store counter, in order to convince the audience that she spends a few sacred moments of the day attending to her finger nails. Walls of rooms must be paneled off by scores of framed pictures, mirrors, etc., so that, no matter where the actor stands, his head will be strikingly set off by some ornamental frame. Floors must look partly like an Oriental bazaar and partly like a fur market. Chairs, tables, cabinets, beds, and what-nots, must carry our minds to Versailles and the Bronx, to Buckingham Palace, and Hollywood. Hangings of plush and silk, tapestries of cloth of gold, curtains of lace or batiked silk, cords of intricate plaiting, must flow from the heights, waving in the breeze to prove that they are real. All this extravagance must be, we presume, in order to show that the heroine lives on an income and not a salary, and in order to give the brides in the audience new ideas for mortgaging their husbands' futures at the installment-plan stores.

With such extravagance of materials in a picture there can be no simplicity or reserve in the pictorial composition, if indeed there can be any composition at all. Whatever design the director gives to the miscellaneous lines and shapes will seem rather like a last despairing effort than the easy, happy touch of a master's hand.

The hysterical extravagance of the movies is further illustrated in the breathless speed which so often characterizes every moving thing on the screen. We feel that, at the end of the road, horses must expire from exhaustion and automobiles must catch fire from excessive friction. Clouds are driven by hurricanes, rivers shoot, trees snap, and the most dignified gentle-

man dog-trots. It is true that some of this breathlessness carries with it a certain thrill for the spectator, but that thrill is by no means to be classed as an æsthetic emotion. It has nothing of that abiding joy which comes from the consciousness of restrained energy in art.

Much of this feverish activity, this "jazz" of the screen, is due to rapidity of projection; and yet the director is responsible, for he certainly knows the probable rate of projection and can control his composition accordingly by retarding actions or by selecting slower actions in place of those which cannot be retarded. Slowness of movement, where it is not unnatural, is pleasant to the eye, as we have said in preceding chapters, but it has a peculiar appeal for the emotions, too. It fills us with a sense of the majesty that none can shake, of the deep currents that none can turn aside.

How to produce a picture that shall impress an audience with its inexhaustible reserve is a secret that remains with him who has the power. So, too, with the other pictorial qualities discussed in this chapter. We know of no formulas by which the mysterious art-emotions can be aroused. Yet if directors and spectators alike ponder over these mysteries, it will surely help them to separate the gold from the dross.

Let us vision an ideal photoplay. It is entrancing, yet restful, to the eye. Its composition is both vigorous and graceful, as harmonious as music. Our sympathies are stirred warmly by the experiences of the persons in the story. We are held in keen suspense as to the dramatic outcome. And we get also the more subtle art-emotions. Our souls are shot through

by the poignancy of fixed and flowing designs. We are fascinated by these designs at the same time that our fancies pass through and beyond them. The visible work of the artist is only a mesh-work through which our imaginations are whirled away into rapturous regions of experiences unlived and unexpressed. Such transports may be brief, yet they are measureless in their flights. Our attention swings back from these far flights into a quiet response to the delicacy of arrangement of line and shape, of texture and tone, of blending and weaving and vanishing values. We feel an exquisiteness too fine for understanding, which tapers away at last until it is too fine for the most sensitive feeling. And during all the while that we are rapt by the poignancy, the imagination, the exquisiteness of the master's production, we feel that a rich reserve lies beyond our grasp or touch. We cannot quite soar to the master's heights, or plumb his depths, or separate the airy fibers of his weaving.

Yet, when such beauty comes to the screen, who shall say that it is a miracle, that the manner of its coming is above every law and beyond all conjecture? And who shall say that the hour of its coming has not been hastened by the million spectators whose judgments have been whetted and whose sympathies have been deepened by taking thought about the nature of art?

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